

A PRACTICAL COMMENTARY ON HOLY SCRIPTURE

FOR THE USE OF THOSE WHO TEACH BIBLE HISTORY

BY

FREDERICK JUSTUS KNECHT, D. D.

AUXILIARY BISHOP OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF FREIBURG.

TRANSLATED AND ADAPTED FROM THE SIXTEENTH GERMAN EDITION

PREFACE BY VERY REV. CANON M. F. GLANCEY,
CHANCELLOR OF THE DIOCESE OF BIRMINGHAM

THIRD ENGLISH EDITION REVISED

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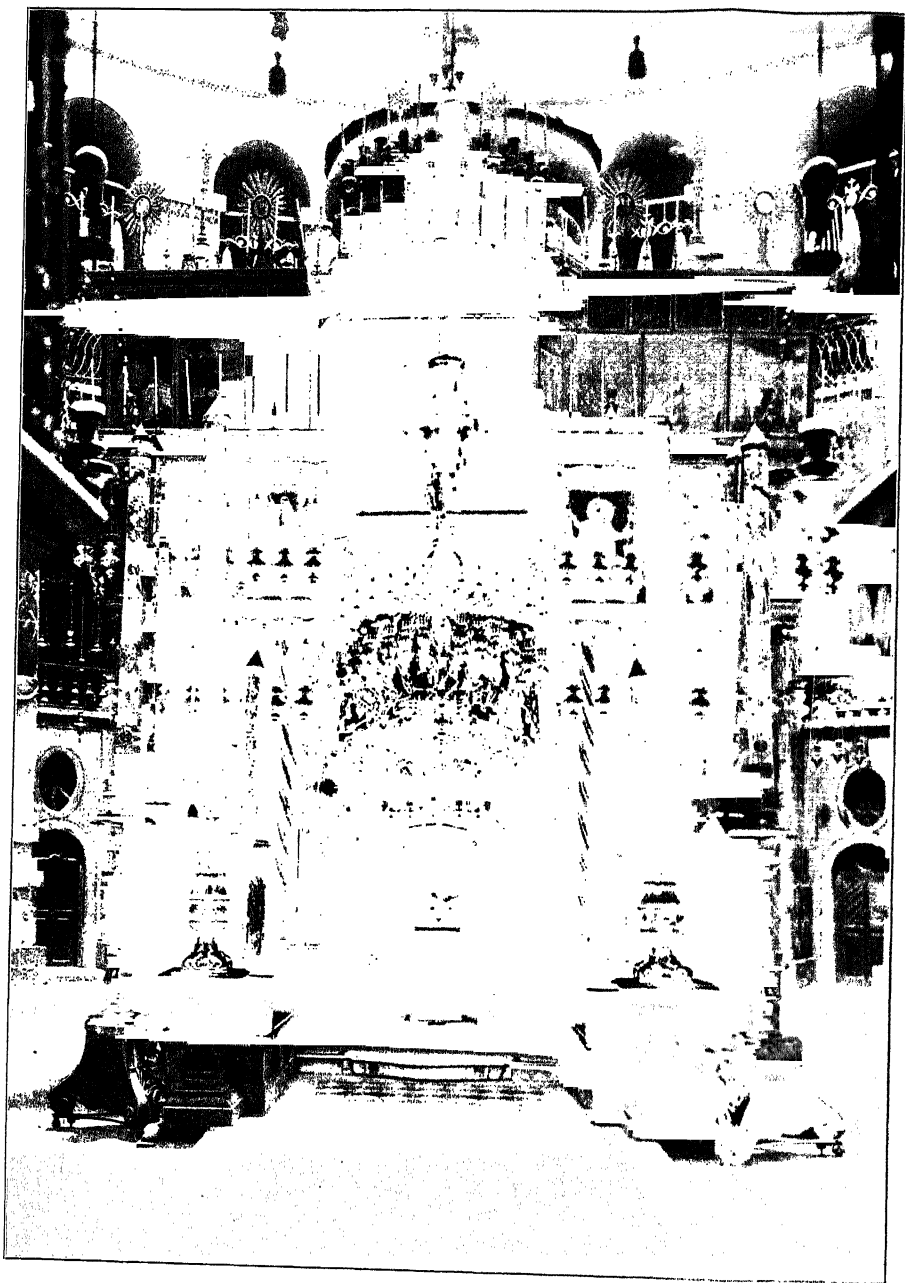
WITH THE APPROBATION AND RECOMMENDATION OF HIS EMINENCE THE LATE
CARDINAL-ARCHBISHOP OF WESTMINSTER AND OF THEIR LORDSHIPS THE ARCH-
BISHOPS AND BISHOPS OF ARMIDALE, AUCKLAND, BELLEVILLE, BIRMINGHAM,
BOMBAY, CALCUTTA, CASHEL, CHRISTCHURCH, FERNS, GLASGOW, HEXHAM AND
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Religious Instruction
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December 1920.



Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem.
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‡ Thomas, Archiep̃ps.

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SOME APPROBATIONS.

We strongly recommend Bishop KNECHT'S "Practical Commentary on Holy Scripture". It contains an Appendix, called a Concordance of Scripture Aids to the Catechism, by reference to which the teacher will find himself in possession of Holy Scripture to illustrate every part of the Catechism. The work has gone through 19 editions, and is the most complete and the most valuable book for its purpose in any language. The English translation has been exceedingly well done, and is preceded by a Preface by the Rev. M. GLANCEY, of the Diocese of Birmingham, in which there are valuable hints on teaching Holy Scripture in combination with the Catechism.

Lenten Letter 1903.

† HERBERT CARDINAL VAUGHAN,
ARCHBISHOP OF WESTMINSTER.

I have devoted as much time as I could afford occasionally to a perusal of this admirable work, and always felt that my spare moments were well spent. The method adopted in explaining the Holy Scripture is plain and simple, and consequently can be easily understood by any one of ordinary capacity. The division of each Chapter into Narrative and Explanation, Commentary, and Application, will render the work of the highest utility to those who are engaged as Catechists or as Teachers in Schools. I can recommend the work strongly, as affording, in the simplest form, a great amount of information on the History of the Old and New Testament.

Catholic Cathedral, Madras, September 20. 1894.

† J. COLGAN,
ARCHBISHOP OF MADRAS.

The translation of Dr. KNECHT'S celebrated "Practical Commentary" is a most valuable and welcome addition to our English literature. Brimful of interest and practical instruction, it should be in the hands not only of every Priest and Catechist, but of the heads of every Catholic family. In a few days we shall have our annual Retreat and Synod. I shall not fail to recommend it strongly to all my Priests and Religious Communities. Wishing the admirable work all the success it deserves,

Christchurch, New Zealand, December 27. 1894.

† J. J. GRIMES, S. M.,
BISHOP OF CHRISTCHURCH.

I have perused Dr. KNECHT'S "Commentary" with much pleasure, interest, and profit. I have no hesitation in pronouncing it to be a most useful handbook for teachers and priest, and to supply a want in English Catholic literature. No doubt, Bible History, bearing as it does on the doctrines of faith, is capable of rendering most valuable service to the teacher of Religion, as proof, illustration, and expansion of doctrinal truth. It becomes an object-lesson, nay a pictorial catechism, setting forth the isolated texts of Scripture found in the Catechism in the full light of their context and surroundings, exhibiting religious truth in its practical bearing on the varied states and conditions of life. To effect all this, it must be read not as a mere story-book, but in close connection with the Catechism, hand in hand with it—Catechism being the guide and Bible History the handmaid. Dr. KNECHT'S "Commentary" seems to have been composed with such objects in view, and hence I feel sure of its receiving a most hearty welcome in English-speaking countries, and of its proving to be of the greatest service to priest and catechist by pointing out so ably the bearing of the Bible History on faith and morals. Catholics need more than esteem and love for the Holy Scriptures—they should know how to use them to the best practical advantage; and Dr. KNECHT'S work is a valuable aid in that direction. I expect it will have a wide circulation, and I should like to see it in the hands of all my priests and teachers, to whose notice I shall bring it by an official channel.

St. Mary's Cathedral, Wellington, N. Z., August 31. 1894.

† FRANCIS REDWOOD, S. M.,
ARCHBISHOP OF WELLINGTON.

I hope Dr. KNECHT'S Commentary on Holy Scripture may meet a wide and ready sale. I am sure it will be found most useful in Catholic families and schools.

Wexford, August 11. 1894.

† JAMES BROWNE,
BISHOP OF FERNS.

I beg to assure you that I shall bring Dr. KNECHT'S "Practical Commentary" under the favourable notice of the Clergy of Cashel, at the earliest opportunity that offers.

The Palace, Thurles, August 9. 1894.

† J. W. CROKE,
ARCHBISHOP OF CASHEL.

The plan of Dr. KNECHT'S "Practical Commentary" seems excellent, and the execution no less so. Whatever system may be adopted by the individual Catechist, he cannot fail to find this Scripture Narrative and Commentary of great practical utility. I shall be very happy to recommend it to my clergy.

42, Greenhill Gardens, Edinburgh, August 9. 1894.

† ANGUS MACDONALD,
ARCHBISHOP OF ST ANDREWS AND EDINBURGH.

I have read a good portion of the second volume of Dr. KNECHT'S "Practical Commentary", and I am more than pleased with the work. It deserves the title "celebrated", which you give to it. It will be a most useful book for Teachers as well as for the Clergy. I shall have great pleasure in recommending it strongly to both.

Bishop's House, Leeds, July 23. 1894.

† WILLIAM,
BISHOP OF LEEDS.

I like very much the plan of Dr. KNECHT'S "Practical Commentary", and think it well adapted to attain the end in view—an intelligent acquaintance with Scriptural History and Doctrine and a practical application of their lessons to the duties of life.

I shall be happy to recommend it to my clergy as a valuable aid to Religious Teaching in our schools.

Spring Hill, Claughton, Birkenhead, July 22. 1894.

† EDMUND,
BISHOP OF SHREWSBURY.

•The "Commentary for the use of Catechists and Teachers" by Dr. F. F. KNECHT, now Auxiliary Bishop of Freiburg, Baden, has been received with the greatest welcome by the Clergy in Germany. It is considered by them as one of the best and most useful works for Catechists and Teachers. I am glad to learn that an English translation of this most excellent work is to be published by you, and I do not hesitate to say that the English edition will become as popular as the original German. It deserves strong recommendation.

Belleville, Ill., April 5. 1894.

† JOHN JANSSEN,
BISHOP OF BELLEVILLE.

I like extremely the Chapters I have read of Dr. KNECHT'S Bible Narrative and Commentary. With an admirable method he combines with the Narrative brief explanatory notes, which he follows up with suitable reflections. To a Catechist in want of a Manual for teaching Bible History this work will be found invaluable.

St. Mary's Seminary, Oscott: Birmingham, March 8. 1894.

† EDWARD,
BISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM.

KNECHT'S "Practical Commentary" is an excellent and useful book. It is written in an interesting, methodical, and instructive manner. I consider it as eminently calculated to inspire its readers with a real love for Holy Scripture and to show them, as Cardinal Vaughan says, in what ways the

Inspired Writings are of practical use to Christian life. Such a book ought to be a welcome and revered guest in all Catholic families, and it deserves to occupy a place of honour in the libraries of Catechists, Teachers and Priests. I strongly recommend it to the Faithful and Clergy of my Archdiocese.

Calcutta, April 2. 1895.

† PAUL, S. J.,
ARCHBISHOP OF CALCUTTA.

I consider Dr. KNECHT'S "Practical Commentary" one of the best handbooks of its kind. Its admirable method accounts for its great popularity. I shall continue to recommend it to my priests and teachers.

Fort Chapel, Bombay, June 14. 1895.

† THEOD. DALHOFF, S. J.,
ARCHBISHOP OF BOMBAY.

Allow me to take the opportunity of assuring you that Dr. KNECHT'S Commentary on Holy Scripture is well known to me as a most valuable aid both to the catechist and the preacher, and I shall be only fulfilling a pleasant duty in bringing it before the notice of the Clergy. The fact that this English Edition is taken from the 16th German edition is a sufficient guarantee that the book is up to date, and adds very materially to its usefulness in the hands of the Clergy.

Bishop's House, Middlesbrough, November 13. 1901.

† RICHARD,
BISHOP OF MIDDLESBROUGH.

PREFACE

TO THE FIRST ENGLISH EDITION.

I.

IN no country, perhaps, has the study of Catechetics made such rapid strides, or its importance been so much appreciated, as in Germany. That country can boast of a band of writers who have enriched the world with a most valuable catechetical literature, treating the subject in a way at once scientific and practical. Gruber, Krawutzky, Overberg, Barthel, Hirschfelder, and Benda are names deservedly honoured by those who can appreciate the importance of Catechetics; but more honourable still are the names of Schuster and Mey, to which must now be added the name of Dr. KNECHT, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Freiburg, the author of several pamphlets on state education and the school question, but better known as the author of the *Practical Commentary*, which entitles him to a place in the front rank of Catechists. Besides issuing Catechisms and Histories, these writers have done what in them lay to elevate Catechetics into a science, and to build it up from a solid foundation. They were quick to see that Catechetics is both a science and an art, and that like every other science it must rest on certain broad principles, and move along certain fixed lines. They recognized that Catechisms must be constructed not haphazard, but on a definite plan and principle, and according to rule. Hence, for years past, the principles underlying Catechetics, its various branches—e. g. Bible History and Catechism—and their mutual interdependence, the catechetical method itself—viz. the mode of imparting the several branches, and the rules to be followed by the Catechist—all, in a word, that goes to constitute the science, has passed through the sieve of exhaustive discussion.

And where do we stand in England? Have we advanced thus far? Or have we so much as grasped the truth that Catechetics is a science at all? On looking into the dictionary I found, indeed, the

word Catechetics, but it was marked with an obelus or death-mark, to show that it was either dying or dead. The thing is not, perhaps, quite as lifeless as its name; but if Catechetics, as a science, still barely lives, it is the utmost that can be said. I am far from saying that there is a lack of earnestness amongst us, or that we have no experienced Catechists who have attained a fair, or, if you will, a large measure of success. Nor am I insinuating that we are not alive to the vast consequences with which success or failure in catechizing is fraught for the future. On the contrary, the steady, if slow, growth of a catechetical literature amongst us points to a growing interest in the subject, and a deepening sense of its importance. All this, however, while proving that we are in point of fact catechizing, only serves to bring out in greater prominence the fact that we are still without the science. Are our tools rusty? Are our weapons broken or blunted? In a word, are our methods right or wrong? Are the instruments we are using adapted to the purpose for which they are intended? Are our Catechisms correctly adjusted, that is, are they set in a manner best calculated to secure their aim? All these are questions on which our future success turns, and which clamour for an answer. If our methods and our instruments are perchance wrong, we are but wasting our energies in attempting to naturalize mistakes, by forming them into a regular system. And what answer can be given to these questions? Until lately no answer has been attempted, even if the question has been asked. But recently an enterprising clerical journal, *Pastoralia* by name, has been rife with discussions that have yet only touched the fringe of these great questions; still I am not without hopes that when the mass of nebulous matter condenses, it may prove to be the beginning of a solid catechetical system.

We in England, then, seem to be just entering on the preliminary stage of discussion. In Germany the stage of discussion has long been passed. And, it will naturally be asked, has the discussion proved as barren of practical fruit as many German discussions have undoubtedly been? What has been the net result? Is any advantage likely to accrue from a discussion? Is not the catechetical system that is stereotyped in practice good enough? These are, I submit, questions that may be profitably discussed, even if the discussion entail no change. At any rate, it can do no harm, if it only strengthen our self-assurance that we are travelling on the right road. For it is not a little singular that the Germans, who have discussed these matters, and we, who have not, move in many respects on totally distinct planes. The Germans, for instance, use a graduated series of Catechisms. There are lower Catechisms, middle Catechisms, and upper Catechisms. In England,

on the other hand, we have practically but one Catechism, which is learnt alike by infants on the gallery, and by youths in the upper orns. Is it better to have one Catechism or a graduated series adapted to the several capacities of those who use them?¹ Surely, it would not be futile to discuss the respective merits or demerits of the two systems. For without presuming to say that either is better than the other, I may safely affirm that ours is not so obviously superior as to be outside the pale of discussion.

Another question closely bound up with the former is to determine what should be the setting and frame-work and general characteristics of a Catechism. Should a Catechism, in a word, be a *Summa Theologica* in miniature? a compendium of Theology? a condensed essence of theological treatises? Should it be couched in technical language? Should it bristle with definitions? Should the definitions be framed with such studied accuracy that the most fastidious philosopher shall be unable to detect the slightest flaw or imperfection? Should they be such that "only a philosopher can read them without a groan"? Or should a Catechism be a *religious primer*?² Should its language be plain and simple, but accurate withal, though without straining after minute shades of accuracy? Should there be more explanations and fewer definitions? By way of illustrating the two methods I will transcribe two answers to the question: What is God? One answer occurs in the English Catechism, the other in Deharbe's Small Catechism, a translation of which is extensively used in the United States.

ENGLISH CATECHISM.

What is God?

God is the supreme Spirit, who alone exists of Himself and is infinite in all perfections.

DEHARBE'S CATECHISM.

What is God?

God is the Lord and Master of heaven and earth, from whom all good things come.

The English definition is made up of a number of ideas of such a hard metaphysical cast as to be wholly impervious to the ordinary mind, to say nothing of the child-mind. Nay, it may be affirmed without exaggeration that only those who have undergone a philosophical and a theological training can ever hope to understand it. The very explanation involves a course of theology. For the definition is the whole treatise *De Deo* in a nutshell. Deharbe's answer immediately stoops to lowly intelligences, and thereby it stoops to conquer. Being adapted to the capacity of children, it will give them, at least, some idea of God, whereas the English definition cannot but leave a blank. And

¹ One and the same Catechism might serve for all grades, if it were printed with some distinction analogous to large and small type.

yet, as Frassinetti rightly contends, the first and chiefest step in catechizing is to give children a grand and exalted idea of God. Even the *Middle Catechisms* do not require their pupils to soar to such metaphysical heights as we expect our infants to scale.

To some it will seem that both methods are right, if each be kept in its place: that we need both a digest of theology and a religious primer. At the same time it is respectfully insisted that the two works are so different in scope and material that any attempt to fuse them into one is foredoomed to failure. Surely, all must allow that religious teaching comes first, theological explanation a long way second, and theological terms are to be admitted only when they cannot be kept out.

Thus we have again veered round to the previous question: whether it is better to have one Catechism or several? Those who maintain the necessity of having several Catechisms, or several grades in the one Catechism, can at all events appeal to the example of St. Paul, who prescribed milk for the weak and solid food for the strong.

There is yet a third point on which we need light, and that is the disposition and order in which the material should be set. In what order should the Catechism be arranged? On a metaphysical or a practical plan? The order followed in the English Catechism is severely metaphysical, and consequently children do not learn till late many things that they require to know early. Take, for instance, the Sacrament of Penance and the Christian's Daily Exercise. These occur in the latter part of the Catechism. And yet, children require these long before this stage in the Catechism is reached, that is, if the present order be followed. And what is the result? That children have to be learning two parts of the Catechism concurrently: one for school-work, and another to fit them for the Sacraments they are about to receive. Thus the school-work is a drag on the Sacraments, and the Sacraments a drag on the school-work, whereas they should be a mutual help one to the other. A question proper to be discussed in Catechetics is how far this double system is a waste of energy, and how far it would be advantageous to arrange the school Catechism on a more useful principle, that is, broadly speaking, in the order in which it is required¹. In the Catechism for the Diocese of Rottenburg the Sacraments follow immediately on the articles of the Creed. This, at all events, is a step in the right direction. For obviously children receive the Sacraments, and therefore require to know about them, before they need a detailed knowledge of the commandments. But still greater advance has been made in the Diocese of Salford. In the manuals of Religious Instruction

¹ Catechisms of this kind are in use in the Dioceses of Birmingham and Salford.

used in that diocese, and approved by Cardinal Vaughan when Bishop of Salford, the questions and answers are arranged, not in the mechanical order with which we are familiar in the ordinary Catechism, but in *subjects*. Here we have, I submit, a valuable hint which, if judiciously acted upon, cannot but greatly simplify the work of learning and, what is more important, of understanding the Catechism.

The incidental mention of the Catechism for the Diocese of Rottenburg suggests another point — and it shall be the last — on which I wish now to touch. This Catechism has in common with our own one notable feature. Underlying both is the remarkable principle of embodying the question in the answer. When this principle was first introduced into the English Catechism, it was looked upon as the golden key that would unlock the portals of knowledge. It was imagined that the automatic action of dovetailing the question into the answer would serve as a sort of plastic medium for transferring to the mind of the child the connexion between question and answer that exists on paper. The physis process by which this result was to be achieved was doubtless wrapped in mystery; but as an expedient for bridging over the abyss between mind and matter, the device was certainly ingenious. It looked very plausible, and no one could say that it might not succeed. Its short-lived existence, however, has but confirmed the old axiom that an automaton will never produce life or intelligence. No one nowadays dreams that it has realized the great expectations that were formed from it. Nay, if I may speak as one less wise, I should say that the soundness of the principle is very widely called in question. Instead of smoothing away, as many object, it has multiplied the difficulty of learning the Catechism by increasing the matter of the answers, already in many cases too bulky¹; and, what is far worse, by giving such undue prominence to the question, it has thrust the answer into the background, and thus the answer is smothered or strangled in the question. Now, which is the more important factor in a Catechism: the question or the answer? The answer to this question is too obvious to need stating; for surely there can be no doubt that the answer is of primary, and the question of only secondary importance. The question is of value only inasmuch as it draws out the answer. It is the answer, therefore, that should be to the front, and the question in the background. Whereas when the question is put in front, and the answer in the rear — when the question is made to overshadow the answer — the natural order is inverted.

¹ Bulky not merely in words, but chiefly in ideas. An answer should contain one fact or one idea; not a fact and a reason for the fact; or a fact and an exception, and a reason for the exception. Questions with a multiplicity of ideas (e. g. What is an Indulgence?), if split up into several, may be made intelligible.

I have said that the English and Rottenburg Catechisms share this principle in common. But, after all, the agreement between the two Catechisms is only apparent. For there is this difference between the two, that in the English Catechism the question was framed before the answer, whereas in the Rottenburg Catechism the answer was framed before the question. Thus in the latter the true principle appears as a living force.

This is a matter of greater import than at first blush it may seem. Not only is this mode of procedure a courageous assertion of the true principle on which I have been insisting; not only is the true proportion between question and answer thereby observed; but it also gives us a glimpse of yet another truth which we seem barely to have realized: viz. that answers gain in clearness and directness when they are unhampered by the stilted phraseology of a preformed question. How much plainer and simpler would Catechisms be, if all were constructed on this plan! Still, if the Rottenburg principle is right, we may reasonably go a step farther and ask, how far it is advisable to have stereotyped questions at all. Will the Catechism of the future—if Catechism it can be called—consist merely of sets of plain simple consecutive statements? That some chapters in the Catechism lose in effectiveness by being put in the form of question and answer, is to me painfully evident. Take, for instance, the last chapter—the Christian's Daily Exercise. Will any one say that the beautiful instructions therein contained would not be far more telling, if written in the form of pithy childlike statements? But, as they stand, they are positively handicapped by the questions to which they form a pendant. And it is to be feared that, in consequence, children often think of the duty inculcated only in connexion with its question in the Catechism.

2.

Leaving the domain of general Catechetics, we now come to that branch which is the subject-matter of the present volume, viz. Bible History. And, first of all, it may be asked: what place does Bible History hold in a course of religious instruction? Bible History is not the foundation on which religious instruction rests, nor the centre round which it revolves, nor the goal towards which it tends. Our religion centres in our faith, which is not a condensed extract from Bible History, but comes from the Church. Not Bible History, then, but the teaching of the Church must, on Catholic principles, be at once the beginning, middle and end of religious instruction. Hence Bible History, to claim a place in religious instruction, must do so only inasmuch as it bears on the doctrines of faith. If this principle be kept steadily in

view, Bible History may be made to render most valuable service in religious instruction. The illustrative light it throws on doctrinal truths makes them more easily intelligible. They become invested with a concrete form, are clothed with flesh and blood, breathe the breath of life, and move like living truths before our eyes. In the Catechism, they appear as cold abstracts and mere outlines. Thus Bible History becomes an object-lesson in faith, a veritable pictorial Catechism. How powerfully, for instance, is the truth of an all-ruling Providence illustrated by the histories of Joseph and Abraham! What, again, is better calculated to teach the power of prayer than the stories of Moses praying while the Israelites fought, and of the Church praying for the imprisoned Peter? On the other hand, the fate of Judas and the rejection of Judas show forth, in all their hideous deformity, the terrible consequences of resistance to grace; while the history of the fall of Eve and of Peter brings out the necessity of avoiding dangerous occasions. In this way, Bible History at once proves and illustrates doctrinal truth. And it likewise develops and expands such truth. The Catechism tells us, indeed, how and why Christ suffered, but Bible History gives a full and detailed account of His sufferings, and so enables us better to realize the infinite love of God and the enormity of sin. The texts of Scripture that in the Catechism stand isolated and shorn of their context, are now seen in the light of their surroundings, and speak to us with a new force and meaning. Moreover, Bible History serves to complete the Catechism. The Catechism, for example, is silent about miracles, about God's mercy and forbearance, His patience and longsuffering. Of humility, and indeed of many other virtues, it is also silent, except that it arranges them over against the opposing vices. But would we learn their nature and properties, and how pleasing they are to God, it is to Bible History that we must turn. The Catechism is monosyllabic in stating the duties that children owe to their parents, masters to their servants, and vice versa; whereas the history of the centurion's servant, of Heli's sons, and of Tobias surrounds these duties with a halo of interpreting light. Again, Bible History exhibits religious truth in its bearing and action on the most varied states and conditions. Virtue and vice stand before us, with life-blood coursing through their veins, in attractive beauty or repellent ugliness. The Good Samaritan invites to mercy; Job, in his resignation to God's will, is a beacon-light to the sorrowing; the Apostles going forth from the scourges, and rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer for Christ, invest with a startling reality the beatitude: *Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake.*

From all this it is clear that Bible History is not to be read, as too often it is, merely as a story-book; that it is to be studied, not on

its own account, but because it imparts life and vigour, picturesqueness and comprehensiveness to religious instruction; because it elucidates, proves, enforces and illustrates the truths that go to make up religious instruction. But, as Dr. Knecht insists, in order that Bible History may be in a position to render these services, it must be "taught in the closest connexion with the Catechism". "Catechism and Bible History must mutually interpenetrate¹, for only in this way is a systematic course of religious instruction possible". Catechism and Bible History must go hand in hand, but Catechism must be in the van. Catechism is the guiding principle, and Bible History its handmaid.

These are the principles, weighty though elementary, on which Dr. Knecht and all writers on Catechetics are generally agreed. And how does practice harmonize with principles? Is practice attuned to principle? Or are the two in hopeless discord? To begin with, how many teachers have mastered the reason why Bible History has a place in religious instruction? How many, or how few, realize the fact that Bible History and Catechism should be "taught in the closest connexion"? And what percentage of those who have grasped this truth put it into practice? There is no denying the patent fact that, as a rule, the two are not taught concurrently, and are not made to run on parallel lines. Ten to one, the Bible History set down for a class in a given year has no connexion whatever with the doctrinal instruction of that year. Thus, while children are being instructed in the Holy Eucharist, their Scripture History turns on that singularly uninspiring period embraced by the reigns of the kings of Israel and Juda! All this comes from being enslaved to the chronological system. This is the root of the evil to which the axe must be laid. Forgetting the plain principle that should underlie the teaching of all Bible History, and utterly ignoring the profit or loss to the children, we have stumbled over the crooked idea that Bible History must be taught chronologically even in our poor schools. I am far from denying, nay, I affirm that a systematic course of Bible History should be given when time and facilities are not wanting, as in our upper schools and colleges. But in our poor schools, where the time barely suffices to give the necessary instruction and to drive it home with religious effect, a slavish adhesion to chronology is to sacrifice realities to figures. To talk of a systematic course in this sense, under such circumstances, is nothing short of preposterous. In the chronological system, Bible History cannot, except by a happy accident, enforce and illustrate the religious instruction. Far from being a help, it is a drawback. Instead of elucidating, it obscures. No longer the handmaid, it seeks to be on an equality with the mistress. For

¹ "In inniger gegenseitiger Durchdringung".

religious instruction to succeed in its great purpose it must, as Dr. Knecht rightly says, be conducted on a "unitive" plan. The unit is the doctrinal instruction, with which the Bible History must be brought into line, unless we are to fly in the teeth of all our principles. Let me now briefly illustrate what I mean by this unification or concentration of subject that I am advocating, lest perhaps I be twitted with pulling down without attempting to build up. Instead, therefore, of teaching children who are being instructed in the Blessed Eucharist about the kings of Israel and Juda, I would teach them the Scripture History of the Blessed Eucharist, as in the following plan¹:

THE HOLY EUCHARIST.

- I. Types of the Holy Eucharist:
 1. The Sacrifice of Melchisedech.
 2. The Paschal Lamb.
 3. The Manna.
 4. The Food of Elias.
 5. The Jewish Sacrifices.
- II. The Prophecy of Malachias.
- III. Christ promises a new Sacrifice:
 1. At Jacob's Well.
 2. After the multiplication of the loaves.
- IV. The Last Supper.—Institution of the Blessed Eucharist.
- V. The two disciples going to Emmaus.
- VI. Miracles illustrative of the Blessed Eucharist:
 1. Water made wine at Cana.
 2. Multiplication of loaves.
 3. Christ walking on the waters.
 4. The Transfiguration.

The important subject of the Church may be treated somewhat similarly.

THE CHURCH.

PART I. THE OLD TESTAMENT.

- I. Introductory.
- II. The Church a Family.
 1. Noe. The ark.
 2. Call of Abraham.—The promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- III. The Church a People.
 1. Moses.
 2. Giving of the Law.
 3. The Tabernacle.
 4. Entrance into the Promised Land.

¹ From *Scripture History for Schools* (No. 3). Approved for use in the Diocese of Birmingham.

IV. The Church a Kingdom.

1. David.
2. Solomon.—Building of the Temple.
3. The kingdom broken up.

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In a word, the Scripture History should be grouped round [the central doctrines of our faith.

3.

A subject largely discussed in Catechetics is the *method* of teaching Bible History. Catechists are now agreed that five factors go to make up the teaching of Bible History: 1. narrative, 2. explanation, 3. repetition, 4. commentary, 5. application. Not to be needlessly prolix, I assume that this is also the order in which they are to be taken. A few words must be said on each.

Narrative. The first stage in teaching Bible History is the narrative. The teacher *tells* the story briefly and pithily, in such a way, however, as to make the actors stand out as living beings, and enable the children to see with their eyes and hear with their ears what is said and done. This is what Fénelon called the "fundamental law" in teaching Bible History. Neglect or slipshod observance of this rule is prolific in failures. And yet, in defiance of this "fundamental law", children are often set to learn the History *in the first instance* from a book! What is the result? The child, failing to understand the story aright at the outset, receives a blurred impression which is never wholly effaced. And no wonder. The negative was bad; and no amount of subsequent dilutions and retouchings will produce a good photograph from a bad negative. It is essential that the first impression should be a good one. If the child fails at first to catch the points of interest, it is bored by the story ever afterwards. But if the story is well told, the child's interest is awakened, and it is all ears to know something further. The narrative is the peg on which all that follows is to hang. Unless the nail be firmly driven in, it will not hold the picture; so unless the points of the story are clearly fixed in the child's mind, it is labour wasted to overlay it with explanations or to attach pendant commentaries.

Explanation. A story well told is half explained. In telling the story, hard words are, as far as possible, to be avoided; but from time to time, words and phrases, usages and customs that need explaining, will find their way into the story. This is all that Catechists mean by the explanation, viz., making clear all that is absolutely necessary for understanding the story aright. It does not mean branching off into learned digressions, or talking over the children's heads. All vapid display of learning confuses rather than explains.

Repetition. So far books have been on the shelf. And often they remain there much longer. Some teachers, taking their stand on high principles, rise to heights of virtuous indignation in denouncing all employment of Bible Histories as pernicious. Books, they say, degrade the learning of Bible History to the clumsiest mechanical operation, and deal a death-blow at intelligence. But surely this denunciation proceeds from a wrong conception of the time and place when books are to be used. If the children are made to learn the history in the first instance from a book, undoubtedly the objection has some force. Then, however, not books but wrong methods are to blame. How can the book rightly used be fatal to intelligence, since intelligence has been brought into play before the book is used at all? For surely it is bringing violence to bear against common sense to contend that reading a story after it has been understood, obliterates intelligence.

After the story has been told, the children open their books, and one or more read it aloud—the teacher adding any further explanations that may be necessary. Teachers—this is important—in telling the story should endeavour to adhere pretty closely to the words of the book. Otherwise, if the language differs notably from that in the book, the children, when reading the story for themselves, will be puzzled and perplexed. Considerable variety in language will only confuse them.

So far the children have listened to the story with attention, and have understood it. But the impression, like lines written in water, will quickly disappear, unless measures be taken to fix it in the memory. This is the next process. Our knowledge is co-extensive with our memory. We know as much or as little as we remember. Memory, says Hirschfelder, is the mortar that holds the bricks together. Without memory, the combined action of understanding, heart and will, can succeed in erecting only a pile of loose stones. Furthermore, many Catechists of note insist that the text should be committed to memory, word for word, at least by young children. Thus Alleker argues that a free reproduction is beyond the capabilities of all but advanced pupils, and that it is far easier for children to reproduce the matter in the form set before them. Hirschfelder truly observes that children are unequal to improving on the form given in the book, and that, when the lesson is not exacted word for word, the tendency, especially in the quicker and brighter children, is to learn it in the most slipshod fashion. Perhaps time will throw light on this question. Meanwhile teachers may do much towards facilitating the by-heart and making it intelligent, by pointing out the natural divisions of the story, the connexion between the several parts, and so forth.

As regards the *repetition in class*, I cannot do better than give in substance Dr. Knecht's words. The repetition consists in the children telling the story independently, and in a connected fashion. It should be no parrot-prattle, no mechanical outpouring of sentences conned by rote; but the story should be told intelligently, with correct expression and emphasis. In particular, teachers should beware of letting the children either speak too quickly, or fall into a sing-song, drawling, or hum-drum style.

Commentary. Hitherto all our efforts have been concentrated on the Bible story in itself. The children have seized the right points of the story; they have learnt the course of events, and have gained an insight into the motives that impelled the actors in the drama; they understand the immediate meaning of the phrases in which the story is told. But the deeper meaning of the story is still hidden from them. The commentary is the key that opens the gate of this wider knowledge.

The Bible narrative is no longer to be viewed as a story, but as a revelation from God, disclosing God's will and God's attributes. Every Bible story contains dogmatic and moral truths. One might almost say that the events happened for the sake of the truths. To draw out these truths, and bring them vividly before the children, is the most important part of instruction in Bible History. And this is the function of the commentary. Thus the commentary brings out the *typical* character of persons and things; it unearths the truths buried in our Lord's parables; it unfolds the spiritual meaning underlying His miracles. But, most of all, it shows what bearing Bible stories have on doctrines of faith and morals, on the cultus and institutions of the Church. Thus the teacher has to hand an instrument which, if wisely used, is admirably adapted for deepening the religious knowledge and strengthening the religious convictions of the children, and for arming their faith at all points. Such is Dr. Knecht's account of the function of the commentary. And he goes on to point out the qualities that the commentary should have if it is to be effective. 1. It must be according to the mind of the Church, whom Christ has appointed to guard and expound Holy Scripture. The commentary is not intended for a platform on which the teacher can air his own crude opinions. 2. It must be catechetical. Both in matter and manner it must conform to the rules of Catechetics, i. e. it must be adapted to the class to which it is given. All platitudes, vague generalities, and scattered reflections wide of the mark are to be carefully shunned, as they leave only a nauseating effect. 3. The teacher must keep steadily in view the close connexion that should subsist between Bible History and religious instruction. On this point sufficient has already been said.

Application. On this last factor little need be said. It consists in holding up the mirror to nature; in making the children realize that the events recorded, though happening ten thousand miles away and some thousands of years back, have an interest and a concern for them, and are part and parcel of their own lives. The temptations and struggles, the falls and conversions, the unkept promises here depicted, are a reflection of our own conduct, and are written for our warning and encouragement and self-knowledge. Moreover, in the application, the truths elicited in the commentary are brought home to the individual child, and are held up to him as a rule of life and conduct.

4.

Such, in short, is the programme that Dr. Knecht has mapped out for himself in his *Practical Commentary*. A programme most inviting and comprehensive! To many, doubtless, it will appear too vast to be

carried out successfully. But I have no hesitation in saying that Dr. Knecht's success is as great as his programme is vast. His work first saw the light in 1883, and since then twelve large editions have been exhausted. This fact alone speaks volumes for his success. His work marks an immense advance on anything that has been published in this country. In fact, we have nothing in any way like it; nothing that approaches it within a measurable distance. Our text-books, at their best, give but a good narrative; at their worst, I fear to say what they do. But best and worst alike have entered into an unholy covenant to give next to nothing beyond the narrative. Now, thanks to Dr. Knecht and his translator, we have a work that, in addition to a good narrative, supplies a good explanation and an excellent commentary. The very idea that Bible History needs an explanation and a commentary will, I suspect, come to many like a bolt from the blue. But I trust that after the appearance of Dr. Knecht's work we shall be ashamed to issue any more Bible Histories in the good old dry-as-dust style.

The narrative in the *Practical Commentary* is Dr. Schuster's Bible History. This work itself has already been translated into eighteen languages, and has run into I know not how many editions. Let it, however, be noted that the *Practical Commentary* is not inextricably bound up with any particular form of narrative, and it will be found equally serviceable with any other narrative that teachers may prefer to take as the groundwork.

In particular, I would call attention to the excellent "Concordance between Holy Scripture and the Catechism", as it is called, given in the Appendix. In it the teacher will find ready to hand an invaluable repertory of Bible stories and explanations for illustrating his catechetical instructions.

In conclusion, I wish to re-echo with all earnestness the words of a writer in the *Schweizer Pastoralblatt*: "I consider this *Commentary* the best and most useful hand-book of its kind . . . I am happy to think that every day strengthens my conviction of its great worth, and I should like to see it in the hands of every priest and every teacher." I will only add that it is indispensable to every teacher who would be abreast of his work. To priests it will be most useful, not only in the school, but also in the pulpit, as it supplies most suggestive material for courses of sermons. And I make bold to affirm that no one, be he priest or teacher, can take up without profit this excellent manual, not the least merit of which is that it has imparted a thoroughly *religious* character to the teaching of Bible History.

MICHAEL F. GLANCEY.

STANLEY HOUSE, ECCLESHALL.

May 17. 1894.

PREFACE

TO THE SECOND ENGLISH EDITION.

WHEN the first English edition was published in 1894, the original German work had reached the twelfth edition; it is now in the eighteenth. The present English edition has been revised according to the sixteenth German edition, and has been as far as possible brought into line therewith, though some freedom has been allowed in adding, altering and omitting portions, in order to adapt them to the circumstances of English readers. The passages of Scripture on which the narrative is based are indicated at the head of each chapter; all notes are placed at the foot of the page; the illustrations are new; and various improvements in matter and form have been effected in both text and notes.

The Revision of the present edition is due to the Right Rev. Monsignor V. J. SCHOBEL, D. D., whose judgment upon Bishop KNECHT'S Commentary deserves to be here recorded. He writes: "I have read the Commentary with genuine pleasure and profit. How it brings home to one the real scope and purpose of the Bible! 'For what things soever were written, were written for our learning: that, through patience and the comfort of the Scriptures, we might have hope' (Rom. 15, 4). The Practical Commentary will prove the very best antidote to the poison of Biblical Criticism now spreading among the masses. Its value, therefore, goes far beyond its immediate scope."

MICHAEL F. GLANCEY.

ST. AUGUSTINE'S, SOLIHULL.

May 1. 1901.

PREFACE

TO THE THIRD ENGLISH EDITION.

THE statements made in the Preface to the Second apply with still greater force to the Third Edition. From the many changes, chiefly verbal, that have been introduced, it is hoped that the work will gain in clearness and conciseness. The present Edition, like its predecessor, has had the advantage of being revised by Monsignor Schobel.

MICHAEL F. GLANCEY.

INSTITUTE OF ST. CHARLES, BEGBROKE, OXFORD.
May 1. 1910.

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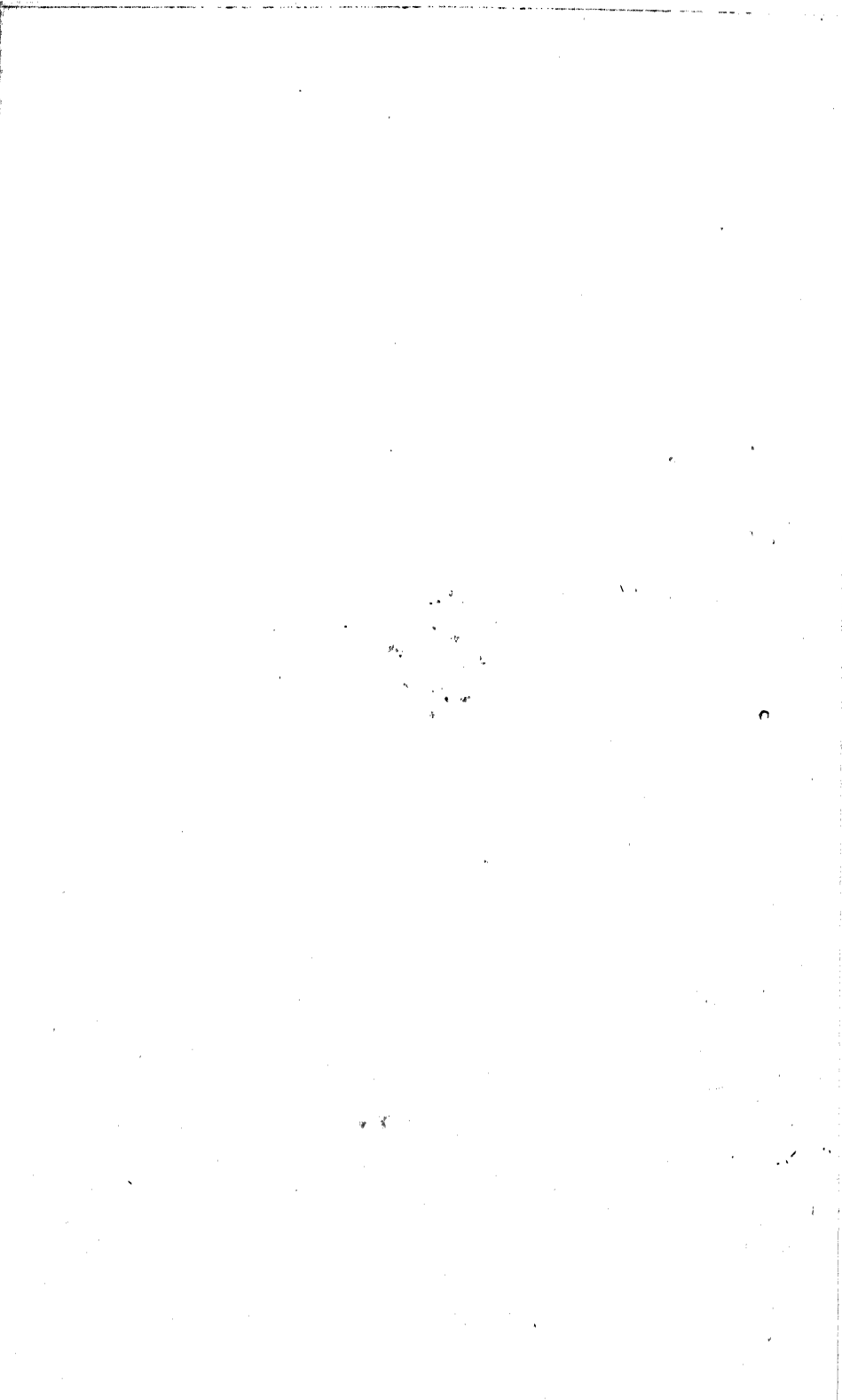
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FIRST PART.
•THE OLD TESTAMENT.



HISTORY OF THE PRIMITIVE AGES OF MAN.

THE TIME FROM ADAM TO ABRAHAM.

(About 4000—2100 B. C.)

CHAPTER I.

THE CREATION OF THE WORLD.

[Gen. 1, 1 to 2, 3.]

IN the beginning¹ God created heaven and earth². The earth was void³ and empty⁴; darkness was on the face of the deep⁵, and the Spirit of God⁶ moved over the waters. And God said⁷: "Be light made!" and light was made. This was the first day⁸.

¹ *In the beginning* of time.

² *Heaven and earth.* i. e. both the visible and invisible worlds. This sentence relates to the whole of creation generally; what follows, to the creation of the earth in particular.

³ *Void.* Which means that it was an unformed mass, all confusion and chaos.

⁴ *Empty.* Without life in it, or without any plants, animals, or men on it.

⁵ *Deep.* i. e. on the unformed mass of primeval matter. This mass was wrapped in gloom and darkness; and, being soft and fluid, is styled "the waters".

⁶ *Spirit of God.* i. e. God, who is a pure Spirit in opposition to the unformed and lifeless mass of mere matter, breathed upon it in order to give life, movement and form to it, and to prepare it for a dwelling-place of men and beasts.

⁷ *Said.* i. e. commanded.

⁸ *First day.* The sacred writer divides the whole work of Creation, as we now see it before our eyes, into six days followed by the Sabbath or day of rest, in order to impress upon his readers that man should follow the example of God, and work six days and rest in God on the seventh. He consequently apportions a work to each day. By "day" he means exactly the same as we mean, namely, a space of time consisting of twelve hours of work and twelve of rest. God Himself does not work in time, but He can be likened to a man who works six days and finishes all

On the second day God said: "Let there be a firmament¹ made amidst the waters; and let it divide² the waters from the waters." And it was so³. God called the firmament heaven⁴.

On the third day God said: "Let the waters that are under the heaven⁵ be gathered into one place⁶; and let the dry land⁷ appear." And it was so done. God called the dry land earth; and the gathered waters, seas. He also said: "Let the earth⁸ bring forth the green herb, and such as may seed, and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after its kind." And it was so done⁹.

The fourth day God said: "Let there be lights¹⁰ made in the firmament of heaven, to divide the day and the night, and

his work in one week. As to the real space of time which the formation of the world required and about which Geologists inquire, the sacred writer says nothing at all. His dramatic narrative is quite independent of it.

¹ *Firmament*. In other words, the atmosphere which surrounds our earth to the height of about 45 miles, and looks to our eyes like a blue dome.

² *Divide*. The firmament was to divide one part of the waters from the other part in this way: God made a considerable body of water to ascend, in the form of moisture (clouds), into the atmosphere, thus separating it from the water which remains and flows on the earth.

³ *It was so*. i. e. it was as God had commanded.

⁴ *Heaven*. This is not the heaven where the angels and saints dwell, and contemplate God. A distinction must be made between that heaven, and the visible, natural heaven, i. e. the firmament.

⁵ *Under the heaven*. i. e. below the atmosphere, or, in other words, the waters that are on the earth.

⁶ *One place*. This one place is the great ocean, out of the midst of which the five parts of the earth rise.

⁷ *Dry land*. God made the water to gather itself together into rivers, lakes, and seas, and the dry land to appear. How this happened is described in Psalm 103, 6 and 8: "Above the mountains shall the waters stand. . . . The mountains ascend, and the plains descend into the place which Thou hast founded for them." The whole earth was covered with water. Then at the command of God, certain parts of the earth's surface raised themselves up. These became dry, because the water ran off them; and the lower parts of the earth's surface, towards which the water flowed, became the sea. About a quarter of the surface of the globe (accurately 27 per cent) is dry land, and nearly three quarters (accurately 73 per cent), water.

⁸ *Earth*. Which was now dry.

⁹ *So done*. God made plants of every kind to grow out of the dry ground, and gave them the power of producing their own seed. From these seeds there sprang new plants, and thus the world of plants never died out.

¹⁰ *Lights*. God made the sun, the moon, and the stars, to give light and warmth to the earth. The heavenly bodies were to serve also as measures of time. The rising of the sun brings day to the earth, and its setting, night. According to the relative position of the sun and moon to the earth, time is divided into years, and seasons, and months.

let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years." And it was so done. God made the sun, moon, and countless stars, and set them in the firmament of heaven, to shine upon the earth, and to rule the day and the night.

The fifth day God said: "Let the waters bring forth the creeping creatures having life, and the fowl that may fly over the earth under the firmament of heaven." And God created fish and birds of every kind, and He blessed them saying: "Increase and multiply."¹

On the sixth day God said: "Let the earth bring forth the living creature² in its kind: cattle and creeping things, and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so done. At last God created man, and gave him dominion over all the rest. And God saw all the works that He had made, and they were very good³.

The seventh day God rested⁴, and He blessed⁵ that day and made it holy.

• COMMENTARY.

The beautiful Order of Creation. The very manner and order in which the sacred writer relates the creation, serves to bring out the order and mutual relation of things created. God had already created light on the first day, but this light was not the light of the sun. It was on the fourth day that God made the sun, to be the giver of light to the earth. God made light first, because without light and without warmth, which is connected with it, there could be no growth, no life, no order in nature.

¹ *Multiply.* They were to multiply of themselves, ever increasing in number. As plants propagate themselves by means of their seeds, so birds and fishes can, by the blessing of God, lay eggs, which in their turn become birds and fishes.

² *Living creature.* i. e. God created the mammals which are the highest race of beasts. God first created the lower and then the higher classes of animals; and, last of all, He created man, the highest of all visible creatures. How God created man, will be told in the third chapter.

³ *Very good.* Everything was as God's goodness and wisdom desired it to be; everything fulfilled the end for which He had created it. He disposed everything in such a way that nothing could be better or more exactly adapted to its purpose than it was.

⁴ *Rested.* Man requires rest after he has worked hard, because he is tired. Can God then be tired? No, God could create thousands of worlds, without being tired. The words, 'He rested', mean this: that after the sixth day, after the creation of man, God created no new kind of being.

⁵ *Blessed.* He ordained that this day should bring a blessing both to soul and body on those who keep it holy.

God made the atmosphere on the second day, because neither plants, nor animals, nor men can live without air. Sound also is impossible without air, so that without it there could have been neither speech nor hearing.

On the third day God made the earth to be dry, and plants to grow on it. But plants, to live and thrive, require something besides light and air. Therefore it was that God had already on the second day caused part of the water to remain in the air, to supply the plants with moisture from above, either by means of dew or rain.

The works of the first three days, and those of the last three, are thus related to each other as the general to the particular, or as the place and its furniture.

1 st day. The light.	4 th day. The bodies of light.
2 nd day. The atmosphere which divided the waters.	5 th day. The inhabitants of the air and water: the birds and fishes.
3 rd day. The dry land.	6 th day. The inhabitants of the dry land: the beasts and man.

Time began with the world. Once nothing existed but the Eternal God alone. "Before the mountains were made, or the earth and the world was formed, from eternity and to eternity Thou art, God" (Ps. 89, 2). Why does not the Psalmist say, 'Thou wast, God', instead of 'Thou art, God'? Because God is Eternal. He is not subject to the changes of time, for with God there is no past, no future, nothing but an everlasting present. "I am who am", God said to Moses (Exod. 3, 14). God exists of and by Himself. Everything else is made by God.

God is Almighty. God created the whole world, visible and invisible, material and spiritual, out of nothing by His almighty will. His almighty power is manifested to us in creation. By His word, that is, by His will, He called into existence the earth, moon, and the whole, to us immeasurable universe, with its millions and millions of heavenly bodies. "God spoke, and they were made; He commanded, and they were created" (Ps. 32, 9).

God works unceasingly. What then do the words, 'He rested on the seventh day', mean? They mean that God rested from this particular work, i. e. from creating, because the universe was finished and complete; but God does not cease from the work of conservation and of natural and supernatural providence. Our Lord says: "My Father works till now and I work" (New Test. XXVI). God is continually working for the good of His creatures, for only He who called the world into existence can sustain and govern it. If Almighty God were to withdraw His hand from the world, at that moment it would collapse and fall into ruin. Every day, every hour of life is a gift of Almighty God.

The Sabbath. With the creation of man, God's plan of creation was completed, and the great work of His creative love was crowned; for man is the most perfect of visible creatures. Then God rested, and appointed the seventh day for man's rest in Him. On the Sabbath, man was to contemplate the wonders of creation, and the preservation and government of the world, and to praise and thank God. On this account the seventh day is also called "the Lord's day", i. e. the day set apart for the service and worship of God. On this day we ought to put aside all worldly business, and think only of our souls and their welfare, for in God alone can our souls find peace and rest. The commandment to keep holy the Sabbath is the oldest commandment that there is. Ever since the world has stood as it is, this commandment has stood with it. The very fact that the sacred writer represents God as working a week, makes Him our pattern and example, and implies a commandment for us to do the same. The law was thus given by God at the creation of the world, and hence it is that among all, even heathen, nations we find one day of rest observed in the week. It is a great impiety to desecrate God's day.

The Nature of God. God is described as a Spirit, existing from all eternity, having life in Himself and being the cause of all created life; an omnipotent Spirit who by the sole act of His will gives existence and life to His creatures. God the Creator of heaven and earth is one God, not two or three. In the Old Testament it was above all necessary to inculcate this unity of God. The people of Israel were not yet ripe to learn the full truth of one God in three persons. But, all the same, in several passages of the Old Testament it is, as it were, hinted that there are more persons than one in God, e. g. in the first part of the history of the creation: "The Spirit of God moved over the waters."

The Wisdom of God. Holy Scripture, or, in other words, the Holy Ghost, says explicitly that all that God made was very good. Short-sighted man should not, therefore, be audacious enough to criticise God's work. Almighty God made everything to fulfil the end for which He destined it. The whole of creation testifies to the wisdom of God, but I will call your attention only to one or two instances. Rivers and streams, many of which are of considerable breadth, are ceaselessly flowing into the sea, carrying into it, even in one single day, a tremendous volume of water. This goes on all the year round, and has been going on for thousands of years, and yet the sea does not overflow! How is this? God has so made it that as much water is incessantly rising into the air from the sea as is being poured into it. But how is it, then, that the streams and rivers do not dry up? Whence comes that volume of water which they are continuously pouring into the sea? The mists and clouds which rise from the sea are driven over the land by the wind, and fall back on the earth in the form of either dew, fog, rain or snow. This moisture collects in the ground and forms

springs. These springs feed the streams and rivers which carry the water back again to the sea. It is owing to this continuous circulation of water that the sea does not overflow, or the rivers dry up. Moreover, those damp exhalations supply the air with that moisture which is necessary to the life of men and beasts, and to the growth of plants. One thing more. You know that water turns foul when it remains for some time without being stirred. How is it that though it is shut in one place, the water of the sea never turns foul? The goodness of God has provided against this by the constant motion of the sea. Twice every day the water flows from the centre of the sea towards the shore, and back again. Besides this, from time to time God sends winds and storms which stir the sea to its very depths. Such phenomena as these show us the wonderful wisdom manifested in the creation and preservation of the world. In like manner all other creatures bear witness to the wisdom of God. Bees, ants, ears of corn, leaves of the trees—in a word, all things teach us to admire His wisdom. Whether we contemplate nature in its greater or lesser aspects, we must exclaim with David: "How great are Thy works, O Lord! Thou hast made all things in wisdom. The earth is filled with Thy riches" (Ps. 103, 24)¹.

The infinite Greatness and Majesty of God are also revealed to us by creation. Think how enormous this earth is! It is 24,899 miles in circumference; the total area of its surface covers 197,000,000 of square miles, the corresponding volume is 260,000 millions of cubic miles. Enormous as this seems, the sun is 1,400,000 times as large as the earth, though it is not so dense. The number of stars, most of which can be seen only through a telescope, amounts to millions, though their number cannot be accurately fixed by man. The nearest fixed star is about twenty billions of miles away from us. If, then, the universe is so great, how much greater must He be who called all these spheres into existence, and who keeps and sustains them in space, pointing out its path to each one! He "tellethe the number of the stars, and calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and great is His power, and of His wisdom there is no number" (Ps. 146, 4. 5). Full of awe and reverence we ought to pray in some such words as these: "Great God, we praise Thee! We praise Thy power, O Lord! The earth bows down before Thee in wonder at Thy works! Even as Thou wast in all time, so wilt Thou be to all eternity. Heaven and earth, sky and sea are full of Thy glory. All things are Thine!"

APPLICATION. God being so infinitely great and wise, we ought to be filled with the deepest reverence for His divine majesty. He is, indeed, the Eternal, the Most High, the Creator

¹ This theme is well treated in the so-called *Bridgewater Treatises*.

and Lord of the whole universe. And yet how little reverence you have borne Him hitherto! Have you not often prayed to Him carelessly? Have you never dishonoured His holy name? Have you not often transgressed His commandments? Firmly resolve, then, that you will for the future honour the Lord your God more, and serve Him more zealously. We pay honour to God by often thinking about Him and by adoring Him with reverence and devotion. St Patrick used to worship God on his knees three hundred times every day. Think more about your Lord and Creator, both to-day and for the future, and pray to Him devoutly and from your heart. Let everything you look at impel you to say thus to yourself: "I praise Thee, O great God, and worship Thy power and wisdom. As many stars as there are in the heavens, as many flowers as grow in the field, as many leaves as there are on the trees, as many drops as there are in the ocean, so many times may God be praised and magnified!"

God made the earth to be the dwelling-place of man, and has adorned it for him with divine prodigality. He has given us much more than is necessary for our existence. Are the numberless flowers which grow, necessary for life? Could we not live without the many sorts of fruit that there are? Take to heart, then, how good and generous God is towards us. Thank Him heartily for His gifts, and resolve that you will from this day forward say your grace before and after meals very devoutly.

CHAPTER II.

CREATION AND FALL OF THE ANGELS.

[Gen. 3, 1 to 5, 24. Apoc. 20, 1—2. Jude 6 ff.]

BESIDES the visible world, God also created an invisible world, namely, innumerable spirits, called angels. They all came forth from the hand of God good¹ and holy, being endowed with excellent gifts² of nature and grace, whereby they might persevere in that state and thus obtain everlasting happiness in union with God. But they did not all continue in that state, for, being possessed of free will, a great many of them abused it, lost the grace of God, and became wicked. They rebelled against God—Lucifer, their leader, saying: "We shall be like unto

¹ *Good.* They loved and wished for only what was good, and pleased God.

² *Gifts.* God has endowed them with such pre-eminent gifts that they are superior to all other created beings. Their chief gifts are sublime understanding, great strength, and, above all, sanctifying grace.

the Most High; we will place our throne above the stars." There was a great strife in heaven. Michael¹ and the other angels who had remained faithful to God, fought against the bad and rebellious spirits, whose chief is now called Satan, or the devil. The bad angels were conquered, and cast from heaven down to hell. The angels who remained faithful² were rewarded with everlasting happiness³. They ever see the face of God in heaven.

COMMENTARY.

The angelic nature, and the infinite perfections of God. The angels are spirits; God is also a Spirit, but there is an infinite difference between Almighty God and the highest angel. The angels have sublime understanding, great wisdom, and much knowledge, but their understanding, wisdom, and knowledge are finite. Their wills are holy and are much more powerful than ours, but they are not infinitely holy, nor are the angels almighty. They have received all their great qualities from God. He alone has His perfections of Himself, and from all eternity: the angels were created by God in the beginning of time and received everything from Him. The angels are, indeed, wondrously perfect, but they are not infinitely perfect. Their perfections have a limit, a measure, a number. God's perfections, on the other hand, are infinitely great, without limit, measure, or number.

The office of the Angels. Like everything else the angels were created for the honour and glory of God. They love and praise God, and fulfil His holy will without ceasing. Hence the meaning of the words in the Our Father: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The name of angel signifies messenger or envoy; this name is given to the good spirits, because God sends them to take care of men and make known to them His will. The angels, being pure spirits, cannot be seen with our bodily eyes, but if it is God's will that men should see and hear them, when they are sent as messengers from Him, they are able to assume a human form. Take, for example, the holy archangel Gabriel who appeared to Zachary and to our Lady.

Pictures of Angels. You have often seen pictures of the holy angels. They are often represented as boys with wings and playing

¹ *Michael.* An archangel, and the leader of the good angels.

² *Faithful.* i. e. to the Lord God.

³ *Everlasting happiness.* The angels had been happy from the beginning, but their happiness was not yet final and complete, because it could be lost. As we have seen, it was lost by the bad angels. But after the good angels had proved steadfast, and had overthrown the bad angels, they received as a reward the supernatural and eternal happiness of heaven, which they could never again lose.

on harps; or again, the holy archangel Gabriel is represented as a youth with wings, holding a lily in his hand, and with a glory round his head. Why should they be drawn like that? They are represented as boys or youths, because they never grow old, but are everlastingly young, and are immortal. The wings signify that the angels are swift as thought, and fulfil God's commands quickly and willingly. The harps are to remind us that the angels ceaselessly sing God's praises. The lily signifies their purity, and the glory, their heavenly splendour. Very often angels are pictured as children's heads without bodies, to signify that they have understanding and free-will, but that they are spirits without bodies.

God is good. Of His love God created the angels, and loaded them with natural and supernatural gifts.

God is just. God's justice is manifested by the punishment of the bad angels and the reward of the good. How did God punish the bad angels? For how long must they remain in hell? For ever and ever! They must suffer everlasting torments! They are rejected by God and are banished from Him for ever and ever! They hardened themselves against Him, therefore repentance was impossible. "God spared not the angels that sinned: but delivered them, drawn down by infernal ropes to the lower hell, unto torments to be reserved unto judgment" (2 Pet. 2, 4).

The evil of mortal sin. God punishes us according to our deserts: He never punishes us too severely. If, therefore, He condemned the fallen angels to the eternal torments of hell, we can see what a terrible evil sin is in His sight. One single mortal sin deserves everlasting punishment.

The consequences of sin. Just think what befell the angels through sin! Before their fall they were the friends and beloved of God, most beautiful, most holy, full of the love of what is good, and rich in their happiness and glory. But since their fall they have been enemies of God, horrible, hideous, and eternally miserable devils! Who, after contemplating this ruin caused by sin, could possibly think that sin, and especially mortal sin, is a trifle which God will not deal with severely? No! mortal sin, far from being a trifle, is the greatest of all evils. It changed angels into devils, and cast them into hell!

Pride. What was the cause of the fallen angels' disobedience? Instead of giving glory to God, from whom they had received all things, they became proud of their great gifts, and, with their leader, said: "We will ascend above the heights of the clouds, we will be like the Most High" (Is. 14, 14). Therefore, Holy Scripture says: "Pride is the beginning of all sin" (Ecclus. 10, 15).

Happiness of the Angels. Almighty God richly rewarded those angels who remained faithful. They gaze upon Him face to face, they

rejoice unceasingly in His infinite beauty and majesty, and are thus made inexpressibly happy. They have lived in this state of rapture thousands of years, and will do so for all eternity. It is thus that rewards those who are faithful to Him, and overcome evil.

The number of the Angels created by God is inconceivably great. The prophet Daniel saw them in spirit, and wrote thus: "Thousands of thousands ministered to Him (i. e. to God), and ten thousand and a hundred thousand stood before Him" (Dan. 7, 10). The phrase means by these words that the angels cannot be counted. And as stars in heaven vary in size and splendour, so are there differences of degree among the holy angels. They are divided into nine choirs according to each one's degree of wisdom, power and glory. They are, beginning with the lowest: Angels, Archangels, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Dominations, Thrones, Cherubim, Seraphim.

Probation of the Angels. The angels are by their nature like God, being highly gifted and pure spirits. To these natural gifts God added the supernatural gift of sanctifying grace, by means of which they became sons of God, thoroughly holy, and wonderfully beautiful. Their state was, even at first, one of great happiness; but by faithfulness in the service of God they were capable of winning for themselves eternal happiness in the beatific vision of God. God will not have forced service; so He gave to the angels the gift of free-will, by which they were at liberty to choose between good and evil, and could fight either with God or against Him. When the decisive moment came, a portion of the angels made a bad use of their freedom, rebelled against God, lost sanctifying grace, and were cast into hell, their virtues having become perverted and bad. But the good angels, who stood the test, were admitted into the immediate presence of God, and were confirmed for ever in supernatural happiness.

APPLICATION. God is just and punishes sin. How is it then, that you think so little of sinning and offending God? You are still young, but you have committed many sins, and have deserved punishment at God's hands. Repent, therefore, of your sins, ask pardon of God, and never say again to yourself: "It is only a trifle!" It never could be a trifle to intentionally offend the great, holy and just God! Resolve, then, most firmly never again to sin wilfully. If you are ever tempted to commit a mortal sin, think of the fallen angels and their eternal torment. Die rather than commit a mortal sin! Fear the just God, and keep His commandments faithfully.

The fall of the bad angels should be a warning to you, and the faithfulness of the good angels should be an encouragement to you. If you are disobedient to God, and do not observe His laws, and if you think lightly of sin, you will some day join the

lost spirits in hell. But if you are faithful in the service of God, and guard against sin as much as you can, you will some day join the angels in their everlasting happiness. Which of the two have you imitated hitherto, the good or the bad angels?

Above all things guard against pride; it is, as Holy Scripture says, hateful before God and men (Ecclus. 10, 7). Do not be conceited or vain about your clothes, or your appearance, or your knowledge, or your parents' position, but give glory to God in all things; for you have received everything from Him. The more God has given you, the more you should thank Him. Drive away all vain thoughts, and say very often: "Every good gift comes from Thee, O God; I thank Thee for all that I am and for all that I have!"

CHAPTER III.

CREATION OF THE FIRST MAN.—PARADISE.—THE FIRST COMMANDMENT.—CREATION OF EVE.

[Gen. 2.]

WHEN God created man, He said: "Let Us¹ make man to Our image² and likeness, and give him dominion³ over all animals and over the whole earth." He then formed⁴ a human body of the slime of the earth, breathed into his face the breath of life⁵, and man became a living soul⁶. At the same moment God added to the nature of man many favours, and, especially, sanctifying grace, whereby He raised man to a higher likeness of Himself. Thus was made the first man, who was named Adam, that is to say, man taken from the earth. By his nature, man was the image of God: by grace, he was the likeness of God.

¹ *Let Us.* i. e. We will make. When God called into existence the rest of the visible world, He simply said: "Let it be!" But in making man, He took, as it were, counsel with Himself, and said: "Let Us make &c." Why did He speak in that way before creating man? It was in order to prove that man was to be superior to other visible creatures, the first among them all.

² *Our image.* i. e. let him be a picture or image of Us, and like unto Us.

³ *Dominion.* i. e. and let him be lord over all the earth.

⁴ *Formed.* To form means to make something skilfully. God Himself made the human body most perfectly out of the earth.

⁵ *Breath of life.* The soul, therefore, is not made from the earth, but is a breath of God.

⁶ *Living soul.* By what means did man become a living being? God breathed a soul into the human body. The soul is the cause of the body's life; without it the body cannot live. When the soul is separated from the body, the body dies.

By a special effect of His goodness the Lord God created expressly for man a garden of pleasure, called Paradise¹. There were in it all sorts of beautiful trees, covered with delicious fruit and in the middle of the garden stood the Tree of Life², and the

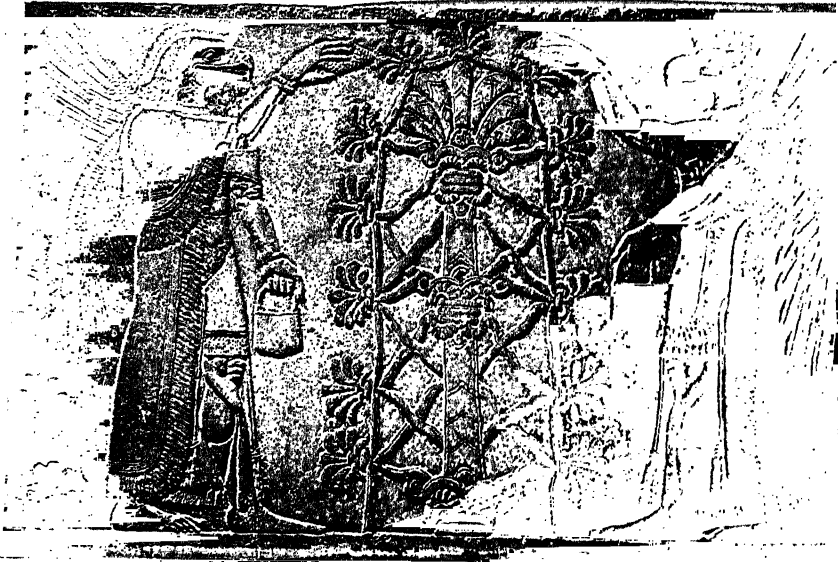


Fig. 1. Assyrian representation of the Tree of Life. Relief from Nimrud. London, British Museum. (Phot. Mansell.)

Tree of Knowledge³ of good and evil. A river, divided into four branches, watered the whole garden. It was in this garden of delights that God placed man, that he might cultivate it for his own pleasure and occupation⁴. God then commanded⁵ man,

¹ *Paradise*. This Paradise was on earth (in Asia), for which reason it is called the earthly paradise. Heaven, the place of eternal happiness, is also called paradise, but it is the supernatural and heavenly paradise.

² *Tree of Life* (Fig. 1). The tree was thus named, because its fruit had life-giving power, preserving the body of man in health and vigour.

³ *Tree of Knowledge* of good and evil. So called from the fact that God had forbidden man to eat of this tree, and that, if he transgressed the commandment, he would learn by a sad and terrible experience the difference between good and evil.

⁴ *Occupation*. In Paradise man worked for his own pleasure, and devoted his strength to the care of the beautiful garden of delights.

⁵ *Commanded*. Almighty God imposed a command on man, in order to prove whether he were thankful, and obedient. This command was very easy to obey, because there was an abundance of every kind of fruit in the garden.

saying: "Of every tree of Paradise thou shalt eat, but of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat; for in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death."¹

Adam was still alone on the earth. Hence God said: "It is not good² for man to be alone; let Us make him a help like unto himself." Then, God caused all the animals to come before Adam, that he might give to each its name. But for Adam there was not found a help like to himself; therefore, casting a deep sleep³ upon Adam, God took one of his ribs and formed of it a woman. When Adam awoke, God brought to him his wife; and Adam rejoiced to see another being like himself. He called her Eve, that is, the mother of the living⁴.

COMMENTARY.

God is good. To know this, you have only to count up the benefits and graces which He conferred upon Adam and Eve.

The twofold likeness of God. Man is the first among all God's creatures on earth, because he was created to the image of God, and is, therefore, like unto Him. This likeness is, however, a twofold one, a natural and a supernatural one, for which reason the two words, image and likeness, are used. For something to be the image of a person or of some other thing, it must be, to a certain degree, like that person or thing; but "likeness" signifies a still closer degree of resemblance. If one person is almost the same as another, we say they are *alike*.

¹ *Die the death.* i. e. become mortal, or subject to death. God added this threat to ensure the keeping of the command. By the threatened penalty of death it was easy for man to perceive how great his sin would be, if he ate the forbidden fruit.

² *It is not good.* This is the only time that God said of His work: "It is not good", because the work was still incomplete. The human race required not only a father, but also a mother. The two form the head and centre of the family. Hence it was not good for Adam to be alone. Furthermore no social life was possible for Adam without a companion like himself. He could not converse with the beasts of the earth that are devoid of reason and language. But why did God call all the animals before Adam? (1) In order that Adam might exercise his dominion over them by giving to each one a name suitable to its character; (2) to prove to him that none of the animals were like himself, and that his nature was far higher than theirs; (3) that Adam, by finding himself lonely in the midst of all the beasts, might feel the want of a companion like himself, and might be the more grateful to God for creating Eve.

³ *A deep sleep.* It was a sleep of ecstasy, during which he was aware of the significance of God's action, both to himself and to all future generations.

⁴ *Living.* i. e. of all men. Adam is the father, and Eve the mother of all men, because all men are descended from them.

Thus the word "image" applies to the natural, and "likeness" to the supernatural resemblance of man to God. The natural likeness of man to God consists in this, that man has a spiritual soul, which not only makes his body live, but is also immortal, reasonable, and gifted with free-will. By these three qualities, it is, in a measure, like unto God, who is eternal, whose intelligence is supreme, and whose will is infinitely free.

These gifts are called natural gifts, because they belong to the nature of the human soul, and cannot be lost by it, though they can be marred and disfigured. The first man's supernatural likeness to God consisted in those gifts which do not belong to the nature of man, but soar far above it, for which reason they are called supernatural gifts. The chief among these gifts was sanctifying grace, whereby the Holy Ghost dwelt in the soul of the first man, and made him a child of God and an heir of the kingdom of heaven. The indwelling of the Holy Ghost carried with it many other gifts, such as the three theological virtues: faith, hope and charity, as well as the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost; the gifts also of freedom from ignorance, sorrow, and concupiscence or evil desires and inclinations. The body also of the first man possessed supernatural gifts. The natural body is frail and subject to sickness and death, because it is made from the earth, and, like every other earthly thing, is perishable. But so long as the first man remained in a state of grace, his body was immortal, and free from all sickness and need of labour. If our first parents had remained in a state of grace, they would not have died, but would have been translated, body and soul, from the earthly to the heavenly paradise.

The body of man, indeed, bears no likeness to God, for God has no body; but all the same it has high prerogatives. It is the dwelling-place and instrument of an immortal soul. It is more delicate and beautiful, more complete and better adapted to every kind of work than the bodies of any of the beasts. It stands erect, and raises its eyes to the heaven for which man was created. It is the masterpiece of the visible creation. Man should, therefore, hold his body in honour and not pollute it by sin. "Glorify and bear God in your body" (1 Cor. 6, 20).

Man is made to rule over the beasts and over the whole earth. The earth belongs to God. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof, the world and all they that dwell therein" (Ps. 23, 1). But He has made it over to man that he may use its good things according to God's will. The rivers and mountains, the fields and woods, the plants and beasts, were made for the use of man, to preserve and gladden his life. We must therefore use the good things of this earth such as gold, silver, meat, drink etc., for a good end, and not abuse them. We should rule over the things of this world, and not make ourselves their slaves, like, for instance, the miser, who is not master of his possessions, but is their slave. Our thoughts and aspirations should

soar beyond this world towards those things which are supernatural and eternal. We must make such use of earthly treasures, as not by their abuse to lose everlasting treasures. It is, moreover, God's will that man should have dominion over the beasts, but it is not God's will that he should be cruel to them. "The just regardeth the lives of his beasts, but the bowels of the wicked are cruel" (Prov. 12, 10). Therefore, be on your guard against cruelty to animals!

Twofold death. By the words: "What day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt die the death", Almighty God threatened man with a twofold death, the death of the soul and the death of the body. This last did not take place immediately after the sin was committed, for Adam lived on earth till he was 930 years old; but all the same, from the moment he sinned, his body became liable to death. The death of the soul, on the contrary, took place the very instant the sin was committed. A distinction must, of course, be made between the natural and the supernatural life of the soul. It cannot lose its natural life, because it is an immortal spirit; but it loses its supernatural life, founded on sanctifying grace and friendship with God, the moment it commits a grievous sin. The loss of grace is the soul's spiritual death, and leads to its eternal death, on which account grievous sins are called mortal or deadly sins.

The Blessed Trinity. The words: "Let Us make &c.", imply that there are more persons than one in God.

The unity of the human race. Why did God form Eve out of one of Adam's ribs? Firstly, because all mankind, even Eve, was to proceed from Adam. Secondly, because husband and wife ought to belong to one another, and to be but one heart and soul by their love and unity.

The happiness of Heaven. The life of our first parents in the earthly paradise was a type of the life of the blessed in heaven. They were perfectly happy in paradise. Peace reigned within and around them, because they were at peace with God. They had abundance of everything; they knew no pain, no want, no vexation, and lived in undisturbed joy and friendship with God and with each other. So also the life of the blessed in heaven is one of supreme happiness: there is no complaint nor sorrow there, nothing but peace, joy and glory. In the earthly paradise God held intercourse with our first parents, as a father does with his children. In heaven the blessed gaze on God face to face, and are united to Him by the closest love. But now comes the difference: the happiness of the earthly paradise could be lost, but the happiness of the blessed in heaven must be theirs for ever.

The probation of man. Man, like the angels, was gifted with free-will, and like them he had to undergo a probation. God gave him a command, by means of which he could freely choose either to side with Him or

against Him. Adam being the representative and father of the human race, there rested on his decision not only his own fate, but the fate of all his posterity. An illustration of this we see in the case of a father who by gambling away his fortune makes his children losers as well as himself.

Marriage. When God gave Eve to Adam to be his companion, and pronounced His blessing on both, He instituted marriage. Being instituted by God, it is in any case a holy state, but Jesus Christ sanctified it still more and raised it to the dignity of a Sacrament. God Himself joins together man and wife. "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder" (Mat. 19, 6). Marriage, therefore, is indissoluble, i. e. a man and his wife must remain joined together till death. Divorce is a crime.

The man is the head of the family. God Himself named Adam, but it was Adam who gave Eve her name. Why did God ordain this so? Because the husband is the head of the wife, and the wife is to obey her husband.

The Tree of Knowledge a type of the Cross of Christ. As by the Tree of Knowledge it was to be decided whether man would choose good or evil, so is Christ the Crucified "set for the fall and for the resurrection of many" (Luke 2, 34). They who believe in Him crucified, and follow Him, will obtain eternal life; but those who will not believe in the crucified Saviour, and will not follow Him, will be eternally lost. The devil conquered by means of the Tree of Knowledge; but by the Cross he was conquered. With the one, sin began; with the other, redemption and salvation.

The Tree of Life a type of the Blessed Sacrament. Even as the life of the body was preserved by this tree, so by the Blessed Sacrament grace, the supernatural life of the soul, is increased and preserved in it, and the soul made worthy of everlasting life. "If any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever", said our Lord (New Test. XXXIV). (About the Tree of Life in the paradise of heaven, see Chapter XCIX. New Testament.)

APPLICATION. God's goodness to man is infinitely great. Just think how He has raised and elevated him! He created him to His own image, and gave him the whole earth for his use. He gave him an immortal soul and sanctifying grace, placed him in the beautiful garden of paradise, and in addition to this gave him the promise of eternal happiness in heaven; for man was intended to occupy those thrones in heaven which the fallen angels had lost. And all this was destined not only for the first man, but for all his posterity. Just think, then, how loving were God's intentions towards man! "Praise the Lord, for He

is good, for his mercy endureth for ever!" (Ps. 117, 1.) "Let us, therefore, love God, because God first hath loved us" (1 John 4, 19). Whatever you may be doing to-day, say: "I do it for love of Thee, O my God!"

CHAPTER IV.

PART I.

THE FALL OF OUR FIRST PARENTS.

[Gen. 3, 1-13.]

OF all the animals that God had placed upon the earth, none was more cunning than the serpent¹. Hence the devil, who was envious of the happiness of our first parents, made use of him in order to seduce them. Eve, prompted by curiosity, approaching the forbidden tree, saw a serpent near it. He began to speak², and said to her: "Why³ has God commanded you that you should not eat of every tree⁴ of paradise?" Eve answered: "Of the fruit of the trees of paradise we do eat; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of paradise, God has commanded us that we should not eat, and that we should not

¹ *Serpent.* The devil, full of envy at the happiness possessed by Adam and Eve, and made more envious still by the thought that they were intended to attain to the everlasting happiness which he himself had forfeited, made use of the serpent by entering into it and speaking by its mouth. God allowed him no other tool, and, indeed, the cunning serpent was admirably suited for his spiteful and evil purpose.

² *To speak.* The serpent into which the devil had entered spoke.

³ *Why.* Satan did not betray his intention by saying at once: "Eat of the fruit", but he began by cunningly asking: "Why &c.?" in order that Eve might be induced to hesitate and question whether the prohibition to eat of the tree of knowledge were a legitimate one, and whether God had really meant it. Eve knew that an ordinary snake can neither reason nor speak; so she must have known that it was some spirit who spoke through the serpent. She ought to have at once perceived that it was no good spirit who thus spoke, for an angel would not have questioned God's will, being quite certain that whatever He had commanded was for the best. Now, what ought Eve to have done? She ought either to have made no answer and fled, or she ought to have said: "God has willed it so. I do not ask why, because God knows best what is good for us." Instead of this, Eve let herself be drawn into conversation with the devil, and thereby he had already gained half his object.

⁴ *Of every tree.* By these words the devil sought to make the woman feel the burden of the restriction and its arbitrariness on the part of God.

touch it¹, lest, perhaps², we die." The serpent said to the woman: "No, surely, you shall not die³ if you eat of the fruit of the tree; but, rather⁴, your eyes⁵ shall be opened, and you shall be as gods⁶, knowing good and evil." Hearing this, Eve gave way to pride, and she saw that the fruit was good and pleasant to behold. She took and ate of the fruit, and gave to her husband, and he also ate. Thus was the first sin committed.

By this first sin they lost sanctifying grace, which was the life of their soul; they lost the immortality of their body; their eyes were opened⁷, and they saw with shame that they were naked. In their shame and confusion they began to sew fig-leaves together, in order to cover their nakedness. But soon they heard the voice of God calling them, and they hid themselves⁸ among

¹ *Not touch it.* Why this command? So that they might keep away from even the occasion of sin.

² *Lest, perhaps.* In this sentence there occur two remarkable words: "lest, perhaps": for God had not said: "*Perhaps* you may die", and we can see by this answer of Eve that she already half doubted whether God's threat had been meant seriously.

³ *Shall not die.* Now the devil becomes more bold, and directly contradicts what God had said, making the Lord God to be a liar.

⁴ *Rather.* i. e. on the contrary.

⁵ *Your eyes.* The eyes of their spirit. How had their eyes been closed hitherto? They possessed great knowledge, but all the same they knew nothing about sin; and therein lay their happiness. By holding out to Eve the prospect of attaining to a further knowledge, Satan wished to excite in her a sinful curiosity.

⁶ *As gods.* Not only like to God, but as God. By this lie the devil wished to make Adam and Eve proud. He represented Almighty God as a deceiver, who withheld this knowledge from them, not out of love, but out of a jealous fear lest they should become like to Him. He wished to destroy Eve's faith in the love and truth of God, and arouse in her instead a mistrust of Him, pride, and sinful curiosity. Alas, he succeeded in his purpose. Instead of being indignant at Satan's blasphemous speech, Eve took pleasure in the prospect held out to her. She allowed a presumptuous desire and sinful curiosity to take possession of her heart; and because it promised so much to her, she now saw that the fruit of the tree was good and pleasant to behold. She longed for it now, and taking some, she ate, and then she persuaded Adam to eat of it also. Revelation has given us no explanation of how Adam was induced to eat of the forbidden fruit. It is left to our conjecture.

⁷ *Opened.* But not in the way they had intended. They knew evil; but this knowledge brought them no happiness, only restlessness, fear and misery. They now knew that they had been deceived, that they had sinned grievously, and had deserved punishment. Having lost their innocence, they were ashamed of being naked, and covered their bodies with fig-leaves.

⁸ *They hid themselves.* It was formerly their greatest happiness when God condescended to speak with them. Now they trembled when they heard His voice and

the trees. And God said: "Adam, where art thou?"¹ And Adam answered: "I heard Thy voice, and I was afraid, because I was naked², and I hid myself." And God said: "Who has told³ thee that thou art naked, but that thou hast eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat?" Adam replied: "The woman whom Thou gavest me to be my companion, gave me of the fruit, and I did eat." And the Lord said to the woman: "Why hast thou done this?" She replied: "The serpent deceived me⁴, and I did eat."

COMMENTARY.

Sin. Adam and Eve transgressed the law of God. It is true that they were persuaded to do so, but still the devil did not force Eve to eat of the forbidden tree, nor did Eve oblige Adam to do so. It was of their own free-will that they sinned.

The manifold sin of Eve, its origin and process. She first sinned by *thought*, in a twofold way: she doubted of God's love, "why has He forbidden us" without any apparent reason? and next she doubted of His veracity, "lest *perhaps*" we shall die. Then she sinned by *desire*, a desire of pride wishing to be like God, and a desire of the flesh wishing to eat of the fruit, because it looked tempting. Lastly she sinned by *deed*. Eating of the fruit she boldly and proudly disobeyed God's commandment, and then inveigled Adam into the same grave sin of disobedience.

Was their sin a grievous sin? Our first parents undoubtedly transgressed the law of God in an important matter, for the prohibition to eat of the fruit was the only positive law which God had given them.

tried to hide themselves. We cannot hide ourselves from God; therefore, it was folly on their part to try to do so. From whence did this folly come? From sin. Sin blinds man and makes his understanding dull, so that he can no longer rightly understand the most elementary religious truths.

¹ *Where art thou?* This meant not only: In what place art thou? but also: In what condition art thou? What has happened to thee? Where is thine innocence? Where is thy good conscience?

² *Naked.* It was not only their bodies which were naked, but also their souls, which had lost their robe of innocence and sanctifying grace.

³ *Who has told?* Why did God ask this? Did He not already know what had taken place? Yes, but He wished Adam to confess his guilt. Adam did so; he acknowledged, and did not deny his sin, but at the same time he excused himself and tried to lay the blame on Eve. She, in turn, laid the blame on the serpent.

⁴ *Deceived me.* Eve knew now that she had been deceived. The serpent had pretended that they would be much greater and happier through their disobedience, instead of which they already felt abased and miserable!

Moreover, on its observance depended their own happiness and that of their descendants, for Almighty God had threatened them with death if they disobeyed Him. They also transgressed the command wilfully, as explained above. Their sin was, therefore, a mortal sin, and a very grievous one. It was not only one sin, but many. It was a sin of proud revolt, of unbelief, of lust, of disobedience, and of ingratitude. God had shown them so much love and had given them so much that they owed Him the greatest gratitude; instead of which they repaid Him with the grossest ingratitude. Moreover, the command was one which they could easily have kept; for they were possessed of greater knowledge than we are, and knew God's infinite love, holiness, and justice much better than we do.

The consequences of their sin were very grave. Satan had pretended that by their disobedience they would be raised, and become as God; but the very opposite took place. They were now cast down from their former high position, and were less like God than they had been, because they had lost sanctifying grace and all other supernatural gifts. Having renounced God by their sin, they were no longer His children and heirs of heaven, but had become children of the devil and heirs of hell! They still retained the natural gifts which made them like to God, but even these gifts were marred. Their reason was obscured, so that they could no longer recognize the truth as they had done, as was proved by the foolish way in which they tried to hide themselves from God. Their hearts and wills were now infected by evil; sinful inclinations were kindled in their hearts, of which they felt ashamed, and which made them hide themselves. Their happiness was gone. They were still in paradise, and paradise was as beautiful as ever, but they felt miserable, because their consciences were guilty and their hearts were full of fear and unrest. "Tribulation and anguish is on every soul of man that worketh evil" (Rom. 2, 9). Those only are happy who have a good conscience, and the peace of God in their hearts. All the possessions in the world cannot make a man happy if he has not got inward peace. But there is no peace for the wicked.

Original sin. The sin of our first parents injured not only themselves but also all their posterity. Their supernatural gifts were given to them not for themselves alone, but for all those who were to come after them. If Adam and Eve had preserved these gifts, their children would have inherited them, and would have come into the world in a state of grace. But our first parents having sinned, and being no longer in a state of grace, their sinfulness has passed down to their children, so that men are now born into the world in a state of sin. The loss of grace with all its supernatural gifts in the children born of Adam is a matter of great displeasure and wrath to God, because contrary to His divine will and institution. Thus they are children of wrath.

APPLICATION. The devil induced Adam and Eve to sin by means of lies. Therefore our Lord says: "The devil is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8, 44). He is the father, i. e. the origin of lies. Have you never imitated him? Hate lies, for they come from the devil! Have nothing to do with them, or you will be a child of the devil. God is truth, and desires and loves only what is true. Stick to the truth if you wish to be a child of God.

Perhaps you think that, if you had been in Eve's place, you would not have allowed yourself to be overcome by temptation. Have you never then taken anything which you have been forbidden to take, such as sugar, fruit &c.? Has not God forbidden you to pilfer or to be greedy, quite as much as He forbade Adam and Eve to eat of the tree of knowledge? Further, did not God give you sanctifying grace in holy Baptism? Has He not placed you in the paradise of His holy Church, in order that you may live a holy life, and attain to the heavenly paradise? Have you not by means of your religious instruction acquired great knowledge, so that you know perfectly well what is right and what is wrong? Therefore, when you offend against the law of God, you have quite as little excuse as Eve. Guard against sin, and firmly resolve never again to offend God wilfully.

Eve's first temptation came from without. We too, as long as we live, shall have to encounter various temptations. They come partly from without, such as those arising from bad companions or other external occasions of sin, and partly from within, from our own bad inclinations, such as anger, sloth, self-will &c. They can also come from the direct suggestions of the evil one. Eve's fall should be a warning to us not to allow ourselves to be seduced by temptations to sin. Had Eve kept away from the forbidden tree, she would not have fallen. Keep away, therefore, from all occasions of sin, or else you are meeting sin half-way. If a bad thought occurs to you, do not dwell on it, but drive it from you, or bad desires will follow bad thoughts. If the Tempter or your own passions whisper to you; "Such and such a thing would not be a great sin! God would not treat it severely!" turn your thoughts at once to the just and holy God who would be outraged by that sin, and remind yourself that sin is the greatest of all evils! Above all things, beware of sinful curiosity. He who wishes to see and hear everything, and who does not shut his eyes and ears when he sees or hears anything evil, will soon have his heart corrupted, and will lose his innocence. Say often and devoutly: "Lead us not into temptation. Defend me, my God, against temptations to evil. Give me the grace to resist them steadfastly!"

CHAPTER IV.

PART II.

GOD'S PUNISHMENT AND CURSE.—PROMISE OF A REDEEMER.

[Gen. 3, 14—24.]

THEN God said to the serpent¹: Because thou hast done this thing², thou art cursed³ among all the beasts of the earth. Upon thy breast shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. I will put enmities⁴ between thee and

¹ *To the serpent.* Adam had laid the blame on Eve; and she had excused herself by pleading the deception of the serpent. As a matter of fact, all three were guilty, and on that account God pronounced sentence on each of them. He began, it is true, by the serpent who had beguiled the woman; He then proceeded to the woman who had led Adam into sin; and finished with Adam himself. The devil had received his supreme punishment when he was cast down into hell with the other fallen angels; but, because he had deceived man and cheated him out of his happiness, God cursed him anew and with him cursed the serpent which had been his instrument.

² *This thing.* i. e. because you seduced Eve by your lies and deceit.

³ *Cursed.* The language of the divine sentence applies immediately to the actual serpent which was the devil's tool. Being cursed by God, it is hated by man on account of its creeping, cunning, and poisonous ways. But in reality the words apply principally to the devil, and signify that he and his followers would be degraded below all other creatures, and would crawl in the filth of sin and base passions, these being, as it were, the very breath of their life.

⁴ *Put enmities.* These clauses are directed only against the invisible and infernal serpent, the devil. Satan had hoped that once⁵ he had succeeded in separating man from God, man would make friends with him, serve him, and remain in his power. But, instead of this, God announced that his very punishment would lie in being overcome by the woman. The seed of the devil are all those who are born in sin and give themselves over to sin. The seed of the woman is the divine Saviour who as Man was descended from her. She, therefore, would tread on the head of Satan, would trample him under foot and overcome him, taking away from him his power over man. But the serpent, i. e. the devil, would resist, and seek to injure the woman. He would not, however, materially injure her, but would lie in wait for her heel; in other words, he would prepare sufferings for her, but would not overcome her. — Mary has overcome the devil through her Son, our divine Redeemer, who has saved first of all her from original sin [Immaculate Conception], and next the whole world from original and actual sins and from the power of Satan. But how, then, has the infernal serpent wounded her heel? The devil caused our Lord much suffering. He it was who prompted Judas to betray his Master. He it was who incited the Jewish priests and Pharisees to cry out: Crucify Him, crucify Him! The devil did this, and yet it is by our Lord's very death on the Cross that the devil has been overcome and the world redeemed!

the woman, and thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel."

To Eve¹ He said: "In sorrow and pain shalt thou bring forth thy children. Thou shalt be subject² to thy husband, and he shall have dominion³ over thee." And to Adam⁴ He said: "Because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee, that thou shouldst not eat, cursed is the earth⁵ in thy work, with labour and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee. In the sweat⁶ of thy face thou shalt eat bread, till thou shalt return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken; for dust⁷ thou art, and into dust thou shalt return."

Then "the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skin and clothed them. . . . And He cast Adam out of the

¹ *To Eve.* The sentence of punishment which Almighty God pronounced on Eve did not apply only to her, but to all women after her.

² *Subject.* Eve was subject to Adam before the fall, as a wife must always be to her husband. But this subjection only implied good order, not any hardship or any abuse on the part of man. It was different after the fall. Subjection became servitude and liable to all sorts of abuses.

³ *Dominion.* Among pagans women were and still are very degraded, and cruelly treated. It is only since the Incarnation and the rise of Christianity that the treatment of women has improved.

⁴ *To Adam.* The sentence that now follows was pronounced on Adam and all men after him.

⁵ *Cursed is the earth.* Adam, the lord of the earth, having sinned, the curse upon him extended to all nature. As a consequence of the curse, the beasts which, before the fall, were attached to man, have become either shy and intractable, or positively ferocious towards him. Even the elements and forces of nature are very often hostile to him, and destroy the work of his hands. Moreover, the devil has obtained a certain dominion over them, and can injure man through them.

⁶ *In the sweat.* i. e. it will be only by the most severe toil that you will be able to obtain bread, or, in other words, what is necessary for the life of yourself and your family. Thorns, thistles, and all kinds of weeds grow naturally from the earth, but corn, which is the chief staple of man's food, can only be made to grow by means of the cultivation bestowed by man on the ground; and this cultivation requires very severe toil.

⁷ *Dust.* Man's body is made of the earth. The name Adam means "made of earth". He lost the gift of the immortality of the body when he lost sanctifying grace. From henceforth his body was to be subject to death and to the diseases which are the precursors of death. When he dies, his body turns to dust, mingling itself with the earth.

paradise of pleasure and placed before it Cherubim¹ and a flaming sword, turning every way to keep the way of the tree of life”.

COMMENTARY.

God is the very Truth. He had threatened Adam and Eve with death if they ate of the forbidden fruit, and what He threatened was brought to pass. Of His mercy, Almighty God did not make our first parents die immediately, for they were not hardened in sin, and were capable of amendment; but, all the same, from that moment their bodies lost the supernatural gift of immortality, and their souls lost that grace which was their life.

The Justice of God. The punishment of Adam and Eve reveals to us the infinite justice of God. Their sin is the sin of the whole human race; therefore, the evil consequences of their sin have passed down to all mankind. We are by birth “children of wrath” (Eph. 2, 3). The image of God is defaced in each one of us. Our reason is obscured, our will is weakened, and the lusts of the flesh refuse to obey the spirit. We are all subject to suffering and death, and no one could attain to heaven, if our divine Redeemer had not died for us. Think of the many passions which hold sway over man! Think of the countless diseases to which he is prone; the countless tears which are shed by him! Think of the bitter pangs of the dying; and of the terrible disasters by fire, water and earthquake! All this is the consequence of sin. How terrible, then, is the justice of Almighty God!

Sin is the greatest of all evils, for all other evils came into the world by sin.

Pride comes before the fall. Adam and Eve having sinned through pride, were humbled by the degrading sentence: “Dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return.”

The first promise of the Messiah. Before Almighty God drove our first parents out of paradise into the misery of the outside world, He gave them the promise of a Redeemer. The thought that by their sin they had condemned themselves to misery in this world and eternal ruin in the next, would have driven them to despair, had not God awakened in their hearts the hope of a coming Saviour. The curse pronounced on the infernal serpent contained a consolation for fallen man. The words: “I will put enmities between thee and the woman &c.”, told Adam and Eve that sin and the devil would be overcome

¹ *Cherubim.* Angels of one of the higher degrees, who were to prevent Adam and Eve from attempting to return to fetch of the fruit of the tree of life. If they had partaken of this means of immortality in a state of sin, it could only have brought them damnation.

some day, and that the gates of the heavenly paradise would be thrown open to them. We can see by this how merciful God was even to fallen man. "The Lord is gracious and merciful, patient and plenteous in mercy" (Ps. 144, 8). God punishes man in mercy, and imposes temporal punishments on him, so as to save his soul and make him eternally happy.

The penalties of sin are also its remedies. Work, whether mental or physical, keeps evil desires and passions at bay. If men were not obliged to work, they would live more in accordance with their bad passions, and evil would be rampant. "Idleness hath taught much evil" (Ecclus. 33, 29). Furthermore, if there were no pain or death, men would sink into mere sensuality, would not trouble themselves about eternity, and would quite forget their higher destiny. Sickness and death are always preaching thus to us: "All earthly things pass away; take heed for the affairs of your soul!" On Ash-Wednesday the Church reminds us in an especial manner that we are but dust and ashes, and that we shall surely die.

Adam, a type of Jesus Christ (Rom. 5, 14). Adam is the father of all men according to the flesh; Jesus Christ is the spiritual Father of the faithful, for through Him alone do they receive life. Through Adam sin and death came to all men; through Jesus Christ we have received grace and eternal life. Sin and misery came into the world by Adam's disobedience; but our redemption has been wrought by Jesus Christ, who became obedient even unto the death of the Cross.

Eve, a type of our Lady. Eve consented to sin; Mary consented to redemption, by consenting to become the mother of the Redeemer. Eve, by her sin, brought misery on mankind; Mary, through her Son, has brought salvation. Eve was, in a natural sense, the mother of the living; Mary is so in a supernatural sense.

The Immaculate Conception. Mary trampled under foot the infernal serpent, not only by giving birth to the divine Saviour, but also by this, that she was always free from the stain of sin, even of original sin. Had she, like the rest of mankind, come into the world with the stain of original sin on her, she would have been, for a time, under the dominion of Satan, and her victory over him would not have been complete. Therefore God, by a special grace, and in view of the merits of her divine Son, preserved her whom He had chosen to be that Son's mother from the taint of original sin.

Why did not God cast Adam and Eve straight into hell, as he did the fallen angels? Because, firstly, their sin, grievous as it was, was not so great as that of the rebellious angels, the angels being richer in grace and knowledge than were Adam and Eve; and moreover, the fact of the fall of these last having been caused by the deception of Satan, was in some measure an excuse for them. Secondly, our

first parents were not hardened in sin, but confessed their guilt and repented of it.

Adam and Eve not eternally lost. They received pardon on account of their belief in the future Saviour; and, on account of their repentance and long life of expiation, were delivered from Limbo by our Lord, and taken by Him to heaven. In the Book of Wisdom (10, 2) it is expressly said that the divine wisdom "drew him (Adam) out of sin".

The curse which, as a consequence of sin, rests on irrational creatures, is removed by the blessing which the Church, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, bestows on natural objects.

Unworthy Communion. Adam and Eve, being in a state of sin, did not dare to eat of the fruit of the tree of life; for, had they done so, they would have been eternally damned. He who receives the Blessed Sacrament (which is prefigured by the tree of life) in a state of sin, draws damnation on himself.

APPLICATION. Sin is the greatest of all evils, and the source of all other evils. You are afraid of lesser evils, such as sickness, danger, or death; why are you so little afraid of the greatest of all evils? Guard against sin, for it leads to sorrow and misery. If you do right, you will have a joyful spirit, a good conscience, and peace and happiness in your innocent heart. But if you do wrong, your heart will be unhappy and uneasy, and the pains of remorse and fear will pursue you, as they pursued Adam and Eve after the fall. Therefore, set enmity between yourself and sin; detest it and flee from it. And often pray devoutly thus: "Deliver us from evil, from the greatest of all evils, sin!"

CHAPTER V.

CAIN AND ABEL.

[Gen. 4, 1-16.]

ADAM and Eve had many children; the first two were Cain and Abel. Cain was a husbandman, or tiller of the earth; Abel was a shepherd. Abel was just¹, but the works of Cain were evil. Now it happened one day that they offered a sacrifice² to God in gratitude for the benefits He had bestowed upon them.

¹ *Just.* He feared and loved God, and believed in the future Saviour.

² *Sacrifice.* i. e. visible gifts for the purpose of thanking God for the benefits already received, and of imploring further blessings from Him.

Abel offered the firstlings¹ of his flock, and Cain, fruits of the earth. The Lord regarded Abel and his gifts with favour, but for Cain and his offerings He had no regard². Seeing this, Cain was exceedingly angry, and his countenance fell³.

And the Lord said to Cain: "Why⁴ art thou angry, and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou do well, shalt thou not receive? but if ill, shall not sin forthwith be present at the door?⁵ But the lust thereof shall be under thee⁶, and thou shalt have dominion over it." But Cain did not heed⁷ the Lord. One day he said to his brother: "Let us go forth abroad." Abel, suspecting no evil, went out with him; and when they were in the field, Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and slew him.

Then the Lord said to Cain: "Where⁸ is thy brother Abel?" Cain replied in an insolent manner: "I know not; am I my

¹ *Firstlings.* i. e. the first born and best and finest of his flock.

² *No regard.* We are not told how Almighty God manifested His pleasure and displeasure. Probably, as at the sacrifice of Elias (Old Test. LXIII), He sent down fire from heaven, which consumed Abel's offering, whereas Cain's, notwithstanding every effort on his part, remained unconsumed.

³ *His countenance fell.* i. e. it became dark and pale with anger. Envy was the cause of his anger. He envied his brother for being in God's favour, and feared that he would receive greater benefits than himself. Instead of winning God's approval by contrition and amendment, he was seized with rage against his innocent brother, although God lovingly warned him in time.

⁴ *Why.* By these questions God wished to bring Cain to self-knowledge, and a realization of the terrible condition of his soul.

⁵ *At the door.* i. e. it will swiftly overtake you.

⁶ *Under thee.* i. e. you must not let these evil passions of envy and anger master you, but subdue them at once and rule over them.

⁷ *Did not heed.* He did not take God's warning to heart. He did not subdue his anger, and therefore it gained more and more mastery over him, till it grew into the fiercest hatred. He could no longer endure the sight of his brother, and at last resolved to kill him. His evil passions quite blinded him. He did not think of the grief which his act would cause his parents, nor did he remember the threats of Almighty God. He enticed his brother into the field, and turning on him struck him dead. What must Adam and Eve have felt when they saw their dear Abel lying dead in his blood, slain by his own brother's hand? Perhaps, blinded by bitter tears, they exclaimed: "Alas, that we must survive this, our son's crime! Woe to us that we ever sinned! Cain has got his bad passions from us: this terrible deed is the consequence of our sin!"

⁸ *Where.* By asking this question God wanted to give Cain the opportunity of honestly and contritely confessing his crime. Had he done so, God would have forgiven him and lessened his punishment. But instead of doing this, Cain made an insolent and defiant reply.

brother's keeper?"¹ And the Lord said to him: "What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth to me² from the earth. Now, therefore, cursed shalt thou be upon the earth, which hath opened her mouth³ and received the blood of thy brother from thy hand. When thou shalt till it, it shall not yield to thee its fruit. A fugitive⁴ and a vagabond⁵ shalt thou be upon the earth."

And Cain, in despair, said to the Lord: "My iniquity is greater⁶ than that I may deserve pardon. Behold! Thou dost cast me out this day from the face of the earth. Everyone, therefore, who findeth me, will kill me." The Lord said to him: "No, it shall not be so; but whosoever shall kill Cain shall be punished sevenfold."⁷ And He set a mark⁸ upon Cain, that whosoever found him should not kill him. And Cain went out from the face of the Lord, and dwelt as a fugitive⁹ on the earth.

¹ *Keeper*. This was as much as to say: "Why dost thou ask me? I am not his keeper!" Being blinded by his passions, Cain believed that he could hide his crime from God, and defiantly lied to Him. After that, God reproached him for what he had done, and pronounced sentence on him.

² *Crieth to me*. Can blood cry out? Almighty God meant this: "Your evil deed is such that it demands punishment from heaven; in other words, it cries out to heaven for punishment and vengeance.

³ *Mouth*. i. e. thou hast with thine own hand shed thy brother's blood which, flowing on to the ground, has been sucked up by it.

⁴ *Fugitive*. i. e. without a home.

⁵ *Vagabond*. i. e. thou shalt never find rest, but shalt always wander to and fro on the earth.

⁶ *Greater*. Cain's defiance changed to despair. He believed that he could not obtain forgiveness, and despaired of God's mercy. He would have liked to hide himself from God. Why did Cain wish to hide himself from God? Because he no longer regarded Him as a loving father, but only as a severe judge; and now the thought of the presence of that God whom he had so offended was torture and terror to him. Having no longer any hope of attaining to eternal life, he clung the more anxiously to this earthly life, and was filled with dread, lest others should kill him, as he had killed Abel. As the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise had taken place about 120 years before, there were probably a great number of people on the earth by this time.

⁷ *Sevenfold*. It was God's will to preserve the life of this murderer, in order that he might serve as a warning to other men.

⁸ *Mark*. This mark was a sign on his face or brow, by which everyone might know who Cain was: that he was a man punished by the hand of God, and on account of his sins condemned to wander about on the earth, and that, being punished by God, he might not be killed by any man.

⁹ *Dwelt as a fugitive*. Weighed down by the curse of God, and tormented by his evil conscience, the fratricide thenceforward led a most miserable life. Day and night the image of his murdered brother was before his eyes, and he wandered

COMMENTARY.

God is omniscient. God knew the minds of both Cain and Abel. He saw Cain's envy and bloodthirstiness, and knew what crime he had committed, even though Cain would not acknowledge it.

God is holy. Therefore the offering of the righteous Abel was well pleasing to Him, but He took no pleasure in the offering of the evil-minded Cain.

God is just. In what way did God show His justice in this story? First by the words: "If thou do well, shalt thou not receive?" and those other words: "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me." Secondly by the fact that He punished the murderer most terribly.

Envy is a capital sin, because, as we have seen in the case of Cain, it leads to many other sins. Cain began by being envious of his brother, and then, because he did not check this feeling, there grew up in his heart a fierce anger against Abel. He did not resist this anger, but rather cherished it, so that it turned into bitter hatred, and kindled in his heart the terrible desire to kill his brother. Then, as he did not resist this thirst for blood, it grew, until at last it led him to commit the horrible crime of fratricide.

Murder. The deadly blow which Cain dealt Abel was intentional and premeditated; and such an action is called murder. Cain was not only a murderer, but also a fratricide, i. e. the murderer of his brother.

The sins which cry to heaven for vengeance. We can see by this story of Cain and Abel, whence comes the expression of sins crying to heaven for vengeance. Wilful murder is counted among them, because of the words of God: "The blood of thy brother crieth &c."

The forgiveness of sins. Is it true that Cain might have obtained forgiveness if he had done penance? His sin was indeed great, but God's mercy is infinitely greater; and the murderer would have been forgiven by God if he had but repented and confessed his terrible sin. Our faith teaches us explicitly that all sins can be remitted if only they are confessed with the proper dispositions. It was Cain's own fault that he did not obtain forgiveness. He would not confess his sin, though God Himself questioned him. We cannot get our sins forgiven

to and fro on the earth, without comfort and without joy. The punishment of Cain was threefold. In the selfishness of his envy he had believed that, if Abel were dead, he would, firstly, receive more blessings from God, secondly, that the earth would produce more under his cultivation, and, thirdly, that he himself would be happier. The exact opposite took place. Firstly, God cursed him; secondly, the earth was barren under his touch; thirdly, he was a prey to constant fear and unrest, and never knew another happy moment.

unless we confess them. Moreover, Cain had no true contrition, and all hope of pardon depends on that. He, however, had given up hope, and despaired of God's mercy.

Free-will. There are those who yield to their evil passions, and then say that they could not help it. Is it true that they could not have helped it? Could not Cain have acted differently from what he did? God Himself had said to him: "Keep your lust under." We are not obliged to follow our evil inclinations, for we have free-will, and can overcome our passions if we choose.

The necessity of grace. Grace is, however, necessary to enable the free-will of man to choose what is right. Cain had received sufficient grace, and if he had corresponded with it, he would have been quite able to overcome his envy and hatred, and would never have become a murderer. Even after his sin he would have been able to obtain pardon, if he had not resisted the grace of God which urged him to repent.

The wonderful working of divine grace for the good of man is shown to us very plainly in this story of Cain. Think how much God did both to keep him from sinning, and to bring him to repentance, after he had sinned, so that his soul might be saved. First, He drew Cain's attention to his ruling passions of envy and anger, in order to bring him to a knowledge of himself. Then He promised him a reward and blessing if he would correct himself, and threatened him with speedy punishment if he let himself be led on to do an evil deed. Lastly, He stirred him up, and exhorted him not to be led away by his evil desires, but to have dominion over them. Even after the terrible deed was done, Almighty God did not at once reject the murderer, and even while reproaching him for his crime, tried to move his heart. He wished Cain to recognise the horror of his deed, to abhor it, and repent of it. He even asked him where his brother was, in order to make the confession of his guilt easier to him. It was only when Cain proved to be hard-hearted and impenitent that God pronounced judgment on him. Even then, the sentence was not an eternal one; it was only temporal ("cursed be thou on the earth"), and might have led him to repentance and amendment. God protected the life of this wretch by a special mark, in order to give him more time for repentance. How good and merciful is God who, as it were, pursues the sinner so indefatigably, and tries in so many ways to move his heart, so as to save him from eternal damnation!

Resistance of grace. Sins against the Holy Ghost. Man, having free-will, is able to resist grace which, much as it may move him and incline him towards what is good, does not force him. Cain's terrible example shows us to what resistance of grace can lead. He would not listen to God's loving exhortation to overcome his envy and anger, but cherished them in his heart, till his anger waxed fiercer and turned

to hatred, and, finally, led him to murder his own brother. Once again, after his crime, Cain resisted the promptings of God's grace. He hardened his heart and sinned directly against God by his lies, defiance and impenitence. It was only after God had pronounced sentence on him, and he already felt its effects, that he acknowledged his guilt. He did not, however, implore for pardon contritely and confidently, but despaired of God's mercy. Which of the sins against the Holy Ghost did he commit? First, he envied his brother on account of the grace God had given him; secondly, he hardened his heart against God's admonitions; and, finally, he despaired of God's mercy.

A right intention is the chief thing. St Paul says (Hebr. 11, 4): "By faith Abel offered to God a sacrifice exceeding that of Cain." What was wanting in Cain's sacrifice? His faith in God and in the promised Saviour was not firm and living, and therefore his worship of God was wanting in reverence and thankfulness. He worshipped Him outwardly, but not inwardly. The gifts which he offered were good, but the intention with which he offered them was not good. Let us learn from this that God does not look merely on our outward works and gifts, but that He looks especially to our intention. "The Lord seeth the heart."

The worship of God by sacrifice. Cain and Abel both brought gifts to God. What did they offer? Fruits and beasts. How did they offer these visible gifts? They burnt them, i. e. destroyed them by fire. They wished to express by this that they kept back nothing of these gifts for themselves, that they desired to offer them wholly to God, from whom all good things come, and to whom all things belong. From whom had Cain and Abel learnt how to offer sacrifice to God? Obviously, from their parents, Adam and Eve. We see, therefore, that men offered sacrifice to God from the very first: that so long as there have been men to worship Him, there have been sacrifices. Sacrifice is the highest and most perfect form of worship, and is essential to religion. The Catholic religion, being the most holy and perfect of all religions, must possess the most holy and perfect of sacrifices. What is this holiest sacrifice, most pleasing to God? It is Jesus Christ Himself, who once sacrificed Himself on the Cross in a bloody manner, and who continually offers Himself for us in the holy Mass in an unbloody manner.

Abel is the second type of Jesus Christ. Abel was just; a shepherd; envied by his brother; slain by him; and his blood cried for vengeance. Jesus Christ is the Most Just, and the Good Shepherd of mankind. Out of envy He was persecuted and slain by His brethren, the Jews. His Blood cries continually for grace and pardon for sinful man.

The homeless, wandering *Cain is a type of the Jewish people* who resisted God's grace, and who, since they slew their God, have been homeless and scattered over the whole earth.

Eve, weeping over the body of her beloved son, slain by the hand of his brother, *is a type of the sorrowful Mother of God* who stood, sorrowing, at the foot of the Cross on which hung her divine Son, slain by His brethren, the Jews.

APPLICATION. Envy is very easily aroused in our hearts. Have you never felt envious when others have been praised or rewarded? Detest envy, and overcome all temptations to it, for it is a hateful sin, and the source of many other sins. "Through the envy of the devil death came into the world, and they follow him who are of his side" (Wisd. 2, 24). If you let envy get possession of you, you are imitating the devil, and are his child. Do you wish to be a child of the devil? If not, be not envious and jealous of others, but rather rejoice when good befalls them. Drive away envy, for from envy came the first murder.

The divine admonition to overcome the desire to sin applies to everybody. If God required of Cain that he should master his evil desires, how much more does He require it of us Christians, to whom so many graces have been given? Examine yourself and see what sin you are most inclined to, whether it be lying, or greediness, or laziness, or disobedience, or anger, or sinful curiosity, and resolve never to give way to it, but to overcome it at once. Resist the beginnings of sin. If Cain had stifled his envy in the beginning, he would not have become a fratricide! God warns you through your conscience, in the same way that He warned Cain. Do not resist these warnings, or you will grow up hard-hearted.

If you have sinned through thoughtlessness or weakness, go at once and confess your sin to the priest, who is the representative of God, and God will forgive you. He who does not make a good confession, is hard-hearted, like Cain.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DELUGE.

(About 2400 B. C.)

[Gen. 5—7.]

ADAM lived nine hundred and thirty years. He had many sons and daughters to whom he announced the law of God and the coming of the Redeemer¹. His immediate descendants also lived to a very great age. Mathusala, the oldest of them,

¹ *Redeemer*. According to the promise that the seed of the woman would overcome sin and the devil.

lived nine hundred and sixty-nine years. The people became very numerous. Some were herdsmen and lived in tents; others built cities and became mechanics¹ and musicians. The descendants of the pious Seth², whom God had given to Adam instead of Abel, were good, feared God, and hence were called the children of God. The descendants of Cain, however, turned away from God³, were wicked, and were called the children of men.

Enoch⁴, one of the children of God, was noted for his faith and piety, and was taken up⁵ alive to heaven. Unhappily, the children of God began to associate⁶ with the children of men, and soon they themselves became wicked. Then God said: "My spirit shall not remain in man for ever, because he is flesh, and his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."

"And seeing that the wickedness of men was great on the earth and that all the thought of their heart was bent upon evil at all times, God repented⁷ that He had made man on earth, and He said: I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth."

¹ *Mechanics.* They practised various arts and trades, such as building, stone-cutting, carpentering, weaving, forging, and the making of musical instruments.

² *Seth.* Seth, being just and holy like Abel, was a compensation to his parents for his loss. God chose Seth to be the heir of the promises, and the forefather of the people of God, and later on of the Redeemer Himself who, according to St Luke (3, 38), was, as Man, descended from Seth.

³ *From God.* i. e. they did not seek God or serve Him. They were called sons of men, or of this world, in contradistinction to the children of the just Seth, who were called the sons of God, because they loved and honoured God as their Lord and Father.

⁴ *Enoch.* He "walked with God", i. e. lived in God's presence, prayed without ceasing, and was united to God by the most intimate love. He was the saint of the primitive ages. His zeal for the glory of God, and his sincere love of his neighbour, urged him to convert sinners, so as to save them from eternal loss.

⁵ *Taken up.* He did not die, but was translated to paradise with his body and soul, as happened later on to the prophet Elias. He, too, was a holy preacher of penance, and was translated without dying.

⁶ *Associate.* In the course of centuries, the children of God intermarried with the children of men, and let themselves be led into their godless ways, so that impiety increased, and at last became general. Then God resolved to exterminate the human race, which was now living so shamelessly in accordance with its own evil passions. But He gave them a hundred and twenty years for repentance and amendment.

⁷ *Repented.* This is a human way of speaking of God who, because He foresees all, does not change or regret His plans. But in order to express that God felt in His divine heart the terrible ingratitude of man and that it deserved punishment, the sacred writer says beautifully "it repented Him that He had made man".

But among these wicked men there was one just and virtuous man, who was called Noe. Noe found favour¹ with the Lord and the Lord said to him: "Make thee an ark² of timber-plank; thou shalt make little rooms in the ark, and thou shalt pitch within and without with bitumen. The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, and the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits³. Thou shalt make a window in the ark, and a door in its side; and thou shalt divide the ark into lower, middle, and third⁴ stories. Behold, I will bring the waters of a great flood upon the earth, to destroy all flesh wherein is the breath of life. But I will establish my covenant⁵ with thee. Thou shalt enter into the ark, thou and thy sons, and thy wives and the wives of thy sons with thee. And of every living creature⁶, of all flesh, thou shalt bring two of a sort into the ark, that they may live with thee. Thou shalt take unto thee of every food which may be eaten, and thou shalt lay it up with thee.

Noe did all that the Lord had commanded him to do. He spent a hundred years in building⁷ the ark (Fig. 2), during which time he preached⁸ penance to the people. But men heeded not the warning. They ate, drank, and were married just as before without a thought of the terrible punishment that was to come upon them. Then the Lord said to Noe: "Go in, thou and all

¹ *Found favour.* It was God's will to spare him, and not punish the just with the unjust.

² *Ark.* A great house, resting on a sort of raft made of wood, shaped and fitted together.

³ *Cubits.* The Hebrew cubit was about 18 inches.

⁴ *Third.* i. e. upper.

⁵ *Covenant.* Of what did this bond or covenant consist? Almighty God promised to save Noe in the ark; and Noe, on his part, undertook to serve God faithfully with his family.

⁶ *Every living creature.* Of clean beasts he was to take seven pair. Those beasts were styled clean which lived on herbage; and especially domestic animals were thus classed. Only clean beasts could be offered in sacrifice. Unclean beasts included (besides swine) all beasts of prey (because they shed blood), all vermin and creeping things.

⁷ *Building.* With the help of his sons.

⁸ *Preached.* Foretelling the coming punishment. The building of the ark ought to have confirmed his words, for each person must have said to himself: "Surely Noe would never have undertaken this great and laborious work if he did not believe in this coming judgment." But they would not allow any serious thoughts to interfere with their impious frivolity, and went on with their pleasure, refusing to believe Noe's words, and scoffing at his warnings. Thus they let the hour of grace go by without profiting by it.

thy house, into the ark; and after seven days I will cause rain to fall upon the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will destroy every substance that I have made, from the face of the earth." Noe entered into the ark, with all his family, taking with him all the beasts¹ that the Lord had commanded him, and the Lord shut him in on the outside.

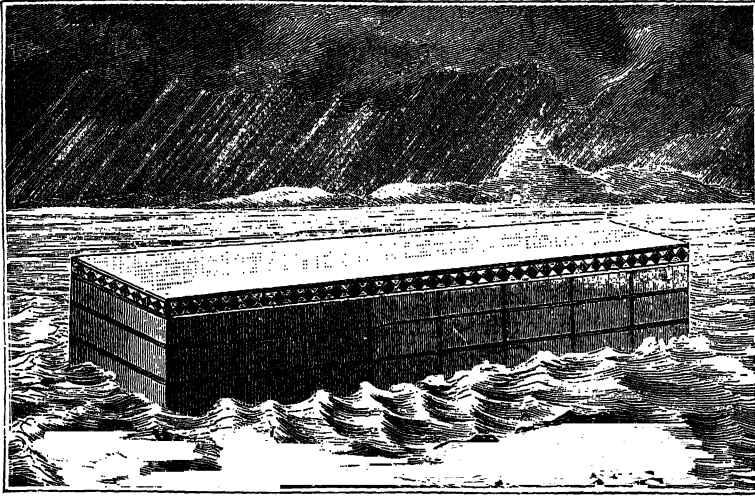


Fig. 2. The Ark. Reconstruction. (After Calmet.)

And when the seven days were passed, the fountains of the great deep² were broken up, and the flood-gates³ of heaven were opened, and the rain fell upon the earth for forty days and forty nights. The waters continued to increase till they rose fifteen cubits above the highest mountains. Thus every living being was destroyed, that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, of cattle, of beasts, and all men. Noe only remained, and they that were with him in the ark.

¹ *Beasts.* God made the animals to flock into the ark in the same way that He gathered them together to be named by Adam, and in the same way that He still draws the birds of passage every year towards the south.

² *Great deep.* That is, the waters under the earth came to the surface.

³ *Flood-gates.* The water which was gathered in the air, and which God kept back, as it were, by flood-gates, broke loose and poured on to the earth. Many of you have seen flood-gates or sluices in a mill-stream, and you know what the water does when they are opened. In the same way, the water burst out of the clouds, and poured unceasingly on to the earth for forty days.

"Others do the same thing." Sinners often speak thus in excuse for themselves. But the Deluge teaches us that such words avail nothing with God. Sin remains sin, and mortal sin remains mortal sin, whether committed by few or many. When everybody was wicked, as in the days of Noe, everybody was punished. At the Last Day we shall not be judged according to the opinions and easy-going principles of the world, but according to the holy Commandments of God and of His Church.

The fortitude of Noe. Among all his other virtues we must admire this the most. He remained virtuous in the midst of a corrupt world, and did only that which was pleasing to God. The wicked people around him did all in their power to lead him astray. They mocked him, because he did not do as they did; but he did not let himself be moved to do evil. He firmly resisted the attractions of the wicked world, and remained true to what was right.

Noe's love of his neighbour. For a hundred and twenty years he laboured for the salvation of the souls of his fellow-creatures, who were walking on the road to ruin. His love of his neighbour was real, practical, and entire.

The Ark a type of the Catholic Church. All those who were in the ark, were saved from death: whosoever is a true child of the Catholic Church, will be saved from everlasting death. There was only one ark of safety: so is there only one true Church in which there is salvation. The ark was designed and built according to God's directions; so was the Church founded by our Lord. The ark did not sink amid the storms of the Deluge, being protected and guided by God; even so the Catholic Church does not sink amid the storms of persecution, being invisibly protected and governed by God the Holy Ghost.

The Last Judgment. The terrors of the Deluge are a type of the Last Day, for our Lord has said (Mat. 24, 37): "As in the days of Noe, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (i. e. when He comes again to judge the world). Great were the fear and lamentation when the Deluge broke forth, but greater far will be the terror felt at the approach of the Last Day. "There shall be then great tribulation such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now" (Mat. 24, 21). And yet many men behave about the Last Judgment precisely as those of Noe's time behaved about the Deluge, passing their lives in frivolity, and fearing nothing. The very same thing which happened to these last will happen to them. The men of Noe's time would not listen to his warnings: they scoffed at him and refused to believe in the judgment that was to overtake them. But when the Flood came, and certain destruction lay before them, they cursed their folly and frivolity, and bitterly envied Noe's safety in the ark. So will it be with men when the Last Day comes. "Then will they say within themselves, repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit: These are

they whom we had some time in derision, and for a parable of reproach. We fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honour. Behold, how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints" (Wisd. 5, 3—5).

APPLICATION. You became children of God by holy Baptism. Have you always lived as such? Have you always prayed willingly and devoutly, and hated sin? Think very often about God, who is everywhere, and sees into your hearts. Henoch took delight in meditating about God. Wherever he went, and whatever he was doing, he had God before his eyes. Each time to-day that you hear the clock strike, or the bell ring, make short acts of faith, hope and charity.

The children of God became corrupt, because they mixed with the children of the world. Man, being naturally inclined to evil, follows bad example very easily. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." One bad apple taints a hundred sound ones, but a hundred sound apples cannot make the bad one good again. Beware, in future, of bad companions. They are not true friends, but the enemies of your soul. Seek the company of pious, God-fearing people. "My son, if sinners shall entice thee, consent not to them" (Prov. 1, 10).

Noe's preaching was all in vain, because the frivolous people heard him indeed with their ears, but did not take to heart what he said. In what way do you listen to sermons and instructions?

Noe feared God, but did not fear the impious world. Very often you fear men more than God. Have you never been ashamed to make the sign of the cross, or to kneel down to say your prayers, or to take holy water? Do not ever again be so cowardly! Pay no attention to the scoffs of bad people, but be strong, and fearlessly confess your faith! Pray earnestly to God the Holy Ghost for the gifts of fortitude and holy fear!

CHAPTER VII.

NOE'S OFFERING.—HIS CHILDREN.

[Gen. 8—10].

NOW God remembered¹ Noe and all that was in the ark, and He sent a wind upon the earth. This moved the waters, and after a hundred and fifty days they began to abate. At length, the ark rested upon a mountain in Armenia, called Mount

¹ *Remembered.* i. e. God saw that now was the time to bring about a change in the condition of Noe.

Ararat¹, and the tops of the hills began to appear. Noe perceived this with great joy, for he had been now three hundred and fifty days shut up in the ark.



Fig. 3.

Noe in the Ark with the returning dove.
Early Christian painting. Catacomb of
S. Domitilla, Rome.

In order to see whether the waters had subsided on the earth, he opened the window and sent forth a raven² which did not return. He next sent forth a dove, but she, not finding a spot whereon to rest her foot, returned to the ark. After seven days he again sent forth the dove. She came back to him, in the evening, carrying in her mouth a bough of an olive-tree³ with green leaves (Fig. 3). Noe, therefore, understood that the waters had abated from off the face of the earth. He stayed in the ark yet other seven days, and he sent forth the dove again, which did not return⁴ to him.

God then said to Noe: "Go out of the ark." So Noe went out of the ark with his wife, his sons and their wives, together with all the living creatures which he had placed in it. Filled with gratitude⁵ towards the Lord who had so wonderfully pre-

¹ *Ararat*. This was a chain of mountains in Asia, south of the Caucasus, between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. The highest mountain in the chain is 17,230 feet high, and is called Ararat, which, in Persian, means the "mountain of Noe", because it was on it that the ark of Noe rested. Naturally, the waters sank slowly. When the tops of the mountains were uncovered, Noe had been 220 days in the ark, and it was a very long time after that, before the level parts of the earth were dry.

² *Raven*. It found quite enough food among the dead bodies floating about, and was able to settle on the mountain-tops. It had, therefore, no wish to return to the confinement of the ark.

³ *Olive-tree*. i. e. a branch of an olive tree, from the fruit of which sweet oil is made. Noe perceived by this that the earth, or at any rate the slopes of Mount Ararat, on which olive-trees grow, were dry.

⁴ *Did not return*. She did not return, because by this time the plains were dry. Noe, however, did not leave the ark of his own accord, but waited for the command of God to whose guidance he had entirely abandoned himself.

⁵ *With gratitude*. Noe was more than a year in the ark (cp. Gen. 7, 2 and 8, 14). What must he have felt when he once more trod on the earth? Whichever way he turned, there was desolation and death: no living creature to be seen, no house nor human habitation! Scattered about were the bones of those who had been drowned: the whole earth was one vast graveyard! Sorrow filled his heart

served him, he built an altar¹ to the Lord and offered on it a sacrifice² of clean animals. The sacrifice of Noe was pleasing to the Lord. He blessed Noe and his sons, and said to them: "Increase³ and multiply, and fill the earth." God made a covenant⁴ with Noe that He would never again destroy the earth with water. The rainbow, which we see in the clouds, is the sign of this covenant between God and the earth.

The sons of Noe were Sem, Cham and Japhet⁵. Now Noe began to cultivate the earth. He planted a vineyard, and, drinking of the wine, he fell asleep⁶, and was uncovered in his tent⁷. Cham, seeing his father thus exposed⁸, spoke of it in a jesting way to his brothers. They, however, filled with a chaste and holy fear, put a cloak upon their shoulders, and, going backwards⁹ so as not to look upon him where he lay, covered their father's nakedness. And Noe, awaking and hearing what had happened, said: "Cursed be Chanaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren." But he blessed Sem and Japhet.

when he thought of the terrible end of those who had perished; but thankfulness, inexpressible thankfulness, rose up within his soul, as he said to himself: "What would have become of me and mine, if God had not so mercifully taken care of me!"

¹ *Altar.* Of stones.

² *Sacrifice.* Of those species of animals of which seven pair had been taken into the ark.

³ *Increase.* Almighty God had said these same words when He blessed Adam and Eve. Noe being the second parent of the human race, God gave him and his sons the same blessing, and in the same words.

⁴ *Covenant.* The covenant was a covenant of friendship. Almighty God promised to be gracious to man, and never more to send a Deluge on the earth, or let the succession of seasons, interrupted by the Flood, be again upset. The rainbow was to be a sign of this covenant, and to remind us of God's mercy and promises.

⁵ *Sem, Cham and Japhet.* From these three all mankind descended. The children of Sem spread principally through Asia, those of Cham through Africa, and those of Japhet through Europe.

⁶ *Fell asleep.* Sufficiently intoxicated to sleep an uneasy sleep. During his restless movements, the covering fell from his body. But how came holy Noe to be drunk? For drunkenness is a sin! He did not drink too much wine intentionally, but through ignorance, not knowing its potency.

⁷ *Tent.* He had no house, only a tent which could be easily taken down and carried away.

⁸ *Thus exposed.* Cham gazed without shame on his father's uncovered body, and went and told his brothers mockingly what had happened, so that they too might go and mock their father.

⁹ *Going backwards.* So that they might have their faces turned, not towards Noe's couch, but towards the entrance of the tent.

COMMENTARY.

The Goodness of God. Almighty God, in His loving mercy, remembered not only Noe, but the beasts in the ark; for He hateth nothing that He hath made. We, too, should be merciful, and carefully avoid cruelty to animals. He who wantonly ill-treats dumb beasts, proves that he has a hard, cruel heart.

God's Faithfulness. Just as the punishment with which God threatened sinful man, was brought to pass in the most terrible way, so the promise which He made after the Deluge, never again to destroy the world by water, has been kept for more than four thousand years.

Confidence in God. In Noe we have a glorious example of this virtue. Full of a living faith in God's presence, wisdom and power, he gave himself over entirely to the direction of divine Providence. Full of confidence in God, and in complete submission to His will, he built the ark and shut himself up in it; nor did he leave it, till God Himself told him to do so. Fear might very well have seized him, and he might very well have asked himself how the animals would fare in the ark, and so forth: and when the ark was driven about hither and thither, the anxious thought of how long it would be able to resist the beating of the waves, might very well have occurred to him. But he allowed no such fears to take possession of him, and confided himself entirely to the Lord God and His holy word. Belief in the wisdom and power of the ever present God ought to fill us also with courage and comfort in time of tribulation, and make us trust in God, and be content with whatever He wills. "Commit thy way to the Lord, and trust in Him, and He will do it" (Ps. 36, 5). He who puts his trust in God, builds on a sure foundation.

Gratitude to God. Why was God well pleased with Noe's sacrifice? Firstly, because it was offered with faith in the future Saviour; and, secondly, because it was offered in thanksgiving. You may imagine and picture to yourself how Noe and his family knelt round the altar, praying with fervour and devotion, thanking God from the bottom of their hearts, and promising Him that they would serve Him all the days of their life, and avoid those sins which had called down such a terrible punishment. Gratitude to God is a holy and essential part of our worship of Him.

The reward of gratitude. Noe's thankfulness pleased the Lord God, so that He gave him still greater blessings. When we thank God for benefits we have received, we prepare the way for new ones.

The olive-branch, brought back to the ark by the dove, showed those who were inside that the destruction on the earth had ceased, and that the time of their liberation was at hand. On this account, the olive-branch has ever since been a token of peace and joy.

Intemperance. Noe's drunkenness was excusable, because he was ignorant of the strength of wine. This is now known to everybody, so that it is a great sin to drink enough to obscure the senses and reason. Drunkenness leads to many other sins, such as quarrelling, fighting, swearing &c., and is, therefore, one of the capital sins. Man may drink wine &c. in moderation, for the purpose of refreshing and strengthening himself. But children should never drink wine, still less, spirits. Such drink is unwholesome for children, and those who indulge in it are pale and sickly, and often stupid and stunted in their growth. But milk and bread make rosy cheeks!

Cham's sin. What Commandments did Cham sin against? Firstly, against the sixth Commandment, by his immodesty. Secondly, against the fourth Commandment. Cham scoffed at, and failed in respect to his father, and spoke evil of him, by needlessly repeating to his brothers what he had seen. What ought Cham to have done when he accidentally found his father in that state? He ought to have turned away his eyes, covered up his father, and not told any one about it.

The blessing and curse of parents. When Noe learnt about Cham's conduct, he pronounced a curse on him and his descendants, and promised a blessing to Sem and Japhet. He foresaw, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that Cham's descendants would, like those of Cain, turn away from God, and be punished by Him. The African negroes are descended from him, and they are to this day sunk in the lowest state of superstition, governed by cruel tyrants, treated as slaves, and often bought and sold as such. Their way of living is very barbarous, and they are very hard to convert to Christianity. The blessing on Sem and Japhet and their children has been fulfilled as completely as has been the curse on Cham. Sem was the heir of the divine promise, for the chosen people of God sprang from him, and of his race was born the Messias. The children of Japhet formed great and powerful nations, and were early converted to Christianity, some of them even in the time of the apostles. You can see by this story that children who are wanting in respect to their parents, are punished by God, but that those who love and honour them, are blessed and rewarded by Him.

Detraction. Just as Sem and Japhet covered their father's nakedness with a cloak, so ought we to cover the faults of our fellow-men with the mantle of charity, and never reveal them except in case of necessity. You commit the sin of detraction, if you reveal the sins of others without necessity.

Noe, the third type of Jesus Christ. Noe was the only just man in a sinful world: Jesus Christ is alone, and of and by Himself, most just, most holy. Noe built the ark for the saving of the human race: Jesus Christ founded the Church in order that in her men might find salvation. Noe preached penance and foretold the Deluge: our Lord

preached penance and foretold the Last Judgment. Noe offered a sacrifice to God, which was so well-pleasing to Him that He made a covenant with him and his posterity: our Lord, by His death on the Cross, offered the most perfect sacrifice, and obtained for all men pardon, grace and everlasting peace. Noe saved the human race by the ark: Jesus Christ saves men by His Church.

APPLICATION. Say a hearty "Deo gratias" (thanks be to God) whenever you have escaped a danger or received a blessing or succeeded in some undertaking. As Noe's first act on leaving the ark was one of thanksgiving, so let your first act, when you wake in the morning, be one of thanksgiving.

Noe was saved in the ark on account of his justice. What have you done to deserve being received into the one ark of salvation, the Church, almost as soon as you were born? Thank God very often for having made you a member of the one true Church. There is, says St Augustine, no greater treasure than the Catholic faith.

Cham's conduct was very wrong. Would it not be wrong of you to look at anything indecent? Be on your guard, therefore, against curious looks, and be modest in dressing and undressing.

Honour your father and your mother. Do not despise them even if they have faults. "The eye that mocketh at his father or that despiseth his mother, let the ravens of the brooks pick it out, and the young eagles eat it" (Prov. 30, 17).

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TOWER OF BABEL.

[Gen. 11, 1-9.]

THE descendants of Noe soon multiplied¹, and again became as wicked as men had been before the Deluge. Now they were unable² to live together any longer, and they said: "Come, let us make a city and a tower³, the top whereof may reach to heaven; and let us make our name famous, before we be scattered abroad in all lands." But God frustrated their foolish design. He

* ¹ *Multiplied*. They had left the mountains of Armenia, and dwelt in the large, fruitful plain between the Euphrates and the Tigris.

² *Unable*. To live together, because of their number.

³ *Tower*. They wished to found an united kingdom, the centre and fortress of which should be this city with its high tower.

said: "Let Us confound their tongue¹ that they may not understand one another's speech." Till then there had been but one language spoken amongst men. So the Lord scattered them from that place into all the lands, and they ceased to build the city. Therefore, the city was called Babel², which signifies confusion, because there the language of the whole earth was confounded.

The children of Sem remained in Asia, and from them descended the Israelites, the chosen people of God. Most of the

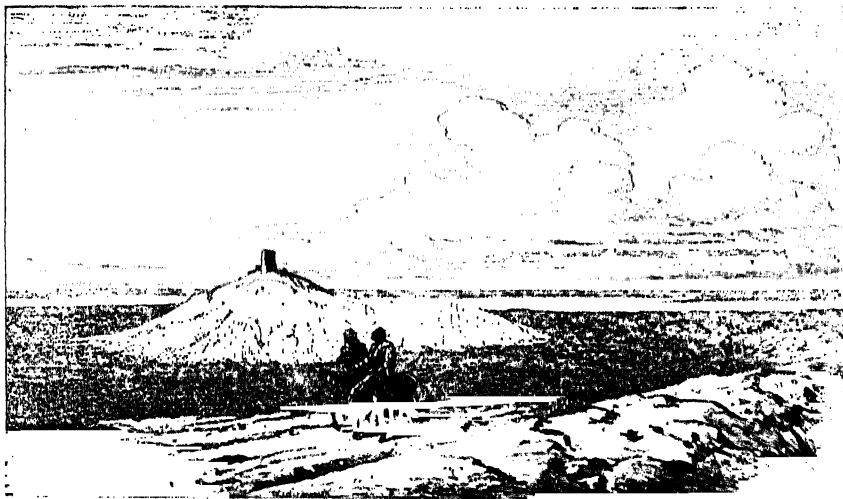


Fig. 4. Birs Nimrud (Tower of Confusion). (After Oppert)

descendants of Cham settled in Africa, while those of Japhet took up their abode in Europe. Thus were different nations founded. The more men multiplied on the earth, the more wicked they

¹ *Confound their tongue.* God introduced various languages among them. Hitherto they had all spoken one language, because they were all the children, first, of Adam, then, of Noe. In the course of time, with the extension of the human race and the development of nationalities, this one original language would naturally have split itself into divers dialects, just as the mental and physical development of the race would have differed according to the different localities in which they were placed. But in order to punish their presumption and compel them to disperse, God brought the change about in a sudden and wonderful manner, while they were still all together, and at work building their tower. They could no longer understand each other, and had to give up their undertaking and separate into different bodies.

² *Babel.* Or Babylon. Among the ruins of this once great city the stupendous foundations of a tower are still to be seen, which are considered to be the remains of the Tower of Confusion (Fig. 4).

became. Their sins darkened their heart and mind, and thus they lost the true knowledge of God, and fell into idolatry. They began to adore a multitude of false gods¹. Some worshipped the sun, moon and stars, others worshipped men and beasts, and even the works of their own hands. To these false divinities even human victims were offered, and sometimes innocent children, who were made to endure the most cruel torments. God left them to go their own way².

COMMENTARY.

Idolatry is a grievous sin against the first Commandment. It is, moreover, unreasonable and foolish, and is a sad proof of the evil effects on man of original sin.

Necessity of grace. God gave the idolaters over to their own evil desires and inclinations. As evil inclinations are rife in man, in consequence of original sin, it is only by God's grace that he is able to keep the commandments. As God withdrew His grace from these men who had rejected Him, they gave themselves over to the desires of their hearts, and were led by their unbridled passions into the most horrible sins.

Pride. This story shows us how man's apostasy from God began by pride. At the time that Noe's descendants built the Tower of Babel, they had increased to some millions in number. They began to build in defiance of God, relying on their own strength and numbers. They did not give glory to God, by acknowledging that they had received all things from Him, and could do nothing without Him. On the contrary, they intended to build a tower which would reach to heaven and make their name famous in all ages. Thus it was pride that prompted this sinful undertaking.

¹ *False gods.* Because men gave themselves over to their bad passions and were further and further removed from God by their sins, they at last lost the knowledge of Him and began to worship the creature instead of the Creator. This worship of false gods is called idolatry, and the people who so worship are called idolaters.

² *Their own way.* Their sin grew and grew, because God gave them over to the desires of their hearts. When Cain began to yield to the passions of envy and hatred, God did not give him over to these passions unwarned. When the children of Cain, the "sons of men", turned away from the true God, He, in His goodness, urged them to penance and conversion through holy Enoch. And immediately before the Deluge, He made the just Noe stand forth and proclaim the punishment which was hanging over mankind. Each of these times God warned sinners and manifested Himself to them: but now when, after the building of the Tower of Babel, men fell away from Him, though He neither destroyed nor punished them, He no longer revealed Himself to them, but gave them over to the desires of their hearts. Because they forsook God, He forsook them; and they had to learn by experience to what they would come when left by God to themselves.

God's Blessing the one thing necessary. This story of the Tower of Babel shows us the truth of the Psalmist's words: "Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Ps. 126, 1).

Necessity of supernatural or revealed religion. The majority of men fell into idolatry about 2000 years after the creation. However, there were always a few just men who, with their families, preserved the faith in the true God, and His revelation; such, for instance, were Abram, Melchisedech, Job &c. But the true faith would have been lost even in those families, unless God had revealed Himself anew, as you will learn He did in the stories which follow. Divine revelation was necessary, or else even man's natural knowledge of God would have been lost. The men of the time of the Tower of Babel possessed a revealed religion, for Noe had faithfully delivered to his descendants the revelation of God handed down by Adam. But as men followed their evil inclinations more and more, their faith became weak. They believed, indeed, but their faith was not living: they lived as if there were no God, until at last they lost the supernatural gift of faith. But, you will say, they could still know God by the light of their natural reason; "for the invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made: His eternal power also and divinity, so that they (i. e. the heathens) are inexcusable" (Rom. 1, 20). But they lost even the natural knowledge of God, because their hearts and wills were so corrupt that they were no longer capable of knowing Him. They spoke thus, as it were, to God: "Depart from us: we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways" (Job 21, 14). When they turned their hearts from God, their reason became more and more blinded by their evil passions, and they fell into the utmost spiritual ignorance, and into the most foolish idolatry. Pride and vice still lead many men to unbelief.

The punishment of dispersion was at the same time a benefit to mankind. If all men had remained together much longer, they would have destroyed each other by civil war and fighting among themselves. (See the strife between the shepherds of Abram and Lot. Old Test. X.)

The re-union of mankind in the Church. People of all tongues are gathered together in unity of faith in the Catholic Church; for all Catholics over the whole face of the earth are joined together in one faith, one hope, one love. This unity of spirit is expressed by the unity of faith and partly also by the unity of language (Latin), used by the Church. In the Catholic Church, therefore, which is governed by the Holy Ghost, the very opposite has taken place to that which took place in the City of Confusion. There, the speech of men was confounded, and they were scattered: in the Church, men of every land and every tongue are gathered together, in unity of faith and speech, by the Holy Ghost whom Jesus Christ sent on Whitsunday. On that day there were collected together many men of different countries, and yet they all understood

the speech of the apostles, and 3000 of them became Christians. On that day was built a city which rests upon earth and reaches to heaven; in which men speak one tongue, and have one faith, and with which God is well pleased. That city is the Holy Catholic Church.

APPLICATION. There are still on this earth 800,000,000 heathens who do not know God and His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Pray earnestly for the conversion of the heathens.

Your forefathers, too, were heathens, and were converted by missionaries sent by the Holy See. Thank God for your holy faith, and confess it by word and deed. Pray fervently to the Holy Ghost to keep you and yours firm in the light of the faith.

HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL¹.

I. EPOCH:

THE TIME OF THE PATRIARCHS.

(About 2100—1500 B. C.)

CHAPTER IX.

THE CALL OF ABRAM.

[Gen. 12, 1—9.]

AMONGST the wicked there was one just and upright man. He was called Abram². The Lord chose him in order that through him and his posterity the true faith³ and hope in the promised Redeemer might be preserved and propagated on the earth. He said to him: "Go forth out of thy country and from

¹ *People of Israel.* Hitherto we have been engaged in a brief study of the primitive history of man. In the last chapter we were told that the larger portion of mankind fell away from God into the grossest idolatry. Of those heathen nations whom God "gave up to the desires of their heart", we hear no more in Sacred History, with the exception of chance accounts of those with whom the people of Israel came in contact. Henceforth Scripture relates only the history of the people of Israel, to whom God revealed Himself again and again. This history is divided into six sections: 1. The time of the patriarchs, 2. the age of Moses, 3. Josue and the judges, 4. the kings, 5. the Babylonian captivity, 6. the time after the Babylonian captivity. The first section, therefore, treats of the patriarchs, or first parents of the children of Israel, and covers a period of 600 years, namely from 2100 to 1500 B. C. It begins with the narrative of the call of Abram which contains the account of how God chose him to be the father of the whole Israelite people (and of the Divine Redeemer).

² *Abram.* Living in the midst of idolaters, he had remained faithful to God. It was on account of his faithfulness that God favoured him, by revealing Himself to him, and by choosing him to be the father of the faithful.

³ *True faith.* i. e. the faith in the true God which had been handed down ever since the days of Adam.

thy kindred, and out of thy father's house¹, and come into the land which I will show thee, and I will make of thee² a great nation. I will bless thee, and magnify thy name, and thou shalt be blessed, and in thee shall all the nations of the world be blessed."³

The father of Abram had gone from Ur in Chaldea, and taken up his abode in Haran⁴, with his relatives; but as idolatry had at last made its way even into that family, the Lord called Abram forth from amongst his kindred. Abram believed the word of the Lord, and instantly set out for Chanaan, taking with him Sarai, his wife, and Lot⁵, his nephew, and his servants and his herds of cattle. After a long journey, he arrived in the land of Chanaan, and came to Sichem (Fig. 5). He was then seventy-five years old. Chanaan, on account of its beauty and fertility, was called a land flowing with milk and honey. There the Lord appeared again to Abram and said to him: "To thy seed will I give this land." Henceforth⁶ Chanaan was also called the Promised Land⁷. Abram, wishing to show his gratitude, raised in that place an altar to the Lord.

¹ *Thy father's house.* God commanded Abram to do this, because idolatry prevailed in his own country, and even among his own kindred. He wished moreover to test Abram's obedience and trust in Him.

² *Make of thee.* i. e. thy descendants shall be a great nation.

³ *Blessed.* From Abram was to descend the Redeemer who would bring grace and blessing to all mankind.

⁴ *Haran.* On the upper Euphrates. See Gen. 11, 31—32.

⁵ *Lot.* i. e. his brother's son. Lot's father was dead.

⁶ *Henceforth.* i. e. from the time God promised it to Abram's descendants.

⁷ *Promised Land.* We Christians call it the Holy Land, because it was there that our Lord lived, laboured and suffered. In geography it is called Palestine. This important country is situated at the east end of the Mediterranean Sea, and occupies a very small space in the eastern hemisphere. It is only about 140 miles long from north to south, and 40 miles broad, and is about as large as Wales. It is bounded on the north by the mountains of Lebanon; on the south by the deserts of Arabia; on the west by the Mediterranean; and on the east by the Syrian deserts. God, in His wisdom, appointed this land to be the abode of His chosen people, because it was so well suited to their peculiar vocation. The land of Chanaan is pretty well shut in on all sides by mountains, sea and deserts, and this seclusion made it more easy for the people of God to keep themselves aloof from heathen nations, and preserve intact the true faith. On the other hand Chanaan was situated in the centre of the then known world, so that it was easy to spread among all nations, first, the promise of the Redeemer, and later on, the preaching of the Gospel.



Fig. 5. View of Nalutlus (Schem).

COMMENTARY.

The second promise of the Messias. The words: "In thee shall the kindred of the world be blessed", contain the second promise of the Messias. The second promise is more explicit than the first, for it says that the Divine Redeemer shall be born of the seed of Abraham.

Necessity of faith. With good reason we are told so explicitly that Abraham believed God, for faith is the first and most necessary of virtues. Faith brought Abraham into the Promised Land; and it is only through faith that we can attain to the promised land of heaven.

Grounds of faith. Abraham believed in God, and in His word because God is the very truth.

The characteristics of faith. The faith of Abraham had all the characteristics of true faith, being entire, firm, steadfast, and living. His faith was *entire*, because he believed all that God told him. It was *firm*, because he doubted nothing, but believed unreservedly in the words of the Lord. It would have been quite natural for him to ask how it was possible for a great nation to spring from him who yet had no child; but he gave ear to no such thought, and simply stood firm by the word of God. His faith was *steadfast*, because he did not allow it to be shaken either by the ridicule and arguments of his unbelieving relations, or by the difficulties and dangers of the journey before him. Finally, his faith was *living*, because he acted up to it, and did all that God required of him.

Obedience to God. Abraham's cheerful obedience to God was a fruit of his living faith. God's command to leave his home was not an easy one to obey, for the natural love of home and kindred is a very strong one. Moreover, God did not tell him whither He was going to lead him. He was commanded to go into an unknown country, among strange people, and was entirely ignorant as to his future fate. Nevertheless, he obeyed God's command promptly and cheerfully. "By faith Abraham obeyed to go out into a place which he was to receive for an inheritance, and he went out not knowing whither he went" (Hebr. 11, 8). He has given us a grand example of obedience, which we ought to imitate. "He that believeth God, taketh heed to the commandments" (Ecclus. 32, 28).

APPLICATION. God has not asked of you anything so hard as He asked of Abraham; and yet how often you disobey Him! Whenever you tell lies, or fly into a passion, or neglect your prayers, or do not do as your parents tell you, you are disobeying God. Be sorry for your disobedience, and when you say your morning prayers, make a resolution to obey promptly and cheerfully those who are set over you.

Having a firm faith, Abram trusted himself cheerfully to the guidance of divine Providence. A childlike confidence in the Providence of our Heavenly Father is a great support and comfort to us in all the circumstances of our lives. Unhappy he who has not got this confidence! We do not know what will happen to us in the future; but we do know that our Father in heaven cares for us, and that not a sparrow can fall to the ground without His knowledge and consent. So whatever happens to you, say: "Whatever God does, is well done, even though I cannot understand it." Say constantly: "God's will be done!" "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!"

CHAPTER X.

ABRAM'S LOVE OF PEACE.—HIS VICTORY OVER THE FOUR KINGS.—THE BLESSING OF MELCHISEDECH.

[Gen. 14, 1—24.]

GOD blessed Abram and increased his herds¹ and those of Lot in such a manner that the pasture in that country was not sufficient for them. On this account a strife arose between the herdsmen of Abram and those of Lot. And Abram said to Lot: "Let there be no quarrel, I beseech thee, between me and thee, and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen; for we are brethren². Behold, the whole land is before thee³: depart from me, I beseech thee. If thou wilt go to the left hand, I will take the right; if thou choose the right hand, I will pass to the left." Lot chose the fertile country about the Jordan⁴, and dwelt in Sodom. Abram dwelt in Hebron, and built there an altar to the Lord.

¹ *His herds.* He had become very rich. A little further on it is mentioned that he had three hundred and eighteen men-servants whom he employed as soldiers. He had camels, asses, sheep and oxen. The camels are used as beasts of burden in the East (Fig. 6, p. 56). There, a good camel costs a great deal of money. The ass is also a valuable beast in those parts, being much larger and stronger than our asses. They do the work of horses, yield very good milk, and their flesh is eatable.

² *Brethren.* Lot was Abram's brother's son, not his brother; but among the Israelites all near relations were called brothers and sisters. Thus, in the New Testament, the relatives of our Lord were called His brethren, though He had no brother.

³ *Before thee.* i. e. you may go into any part of the country you choose. Thus Abram left the choice to Lot.

⁴ *Jordan.* The Jordan is the principal river of the Promised Land. It takes its rise in Mount Lebanon, flows through Canaan from north to south, and runs into the Dead Sea. The country about the Jordan which Lot chose was not the

Some time after this, strange kings, having come into the land, began to rob and plunder the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, took Lot captive, and seized all his substance¹. As soon as Abram heard² that Lot had been taken captive, he, with three hundred and eighteen well-armed men, his servants, pursued the kings, overtook them, rescued Lot from their hands, and brought him back with all his possessions. As Abram returned victorious Melchisedech, king of Salem³, and the king of Sodom went out to meet him. Melchisedech, being a priest of the Most High



Fig. 6. Bedouins riding on their Camels.

offered to the Lord a sacrifice of bread and wine, as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for Abram and his servants. He blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram by the Most High God, by

valley north of the Dead Sea, but what is now the southern part of the Dead Sea itself, south of the peninsula. This part was not sea then, but a beautiful valley, watered by springs, in which lay the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is only since the destruction of those cities that the beautiful plain has become a part of the Dead Sea.

¹ *All his substance.* i. e. all that he possessed.

² *Heard.* From one of Lot's people, who had fled from Sodom to Abram at Hebron. Abram immediately collected together those of his servants who were strong and able to fight, pursued the kings, who had retreated towards the north, surprised them in the night, defeated them, and set free Lot and the other prisoners.

³ *Salem.* This was later called Jerusalem. Melchisedech believed in the true God, and was at the same time king and priest. As priest, he blessed Abram, and returned thanks to God for his victory over an enemy, who was so much stronger than himself. His sacrifice was, therefore, a thank-offering.

whose protection the enemies are in thy hands."¹ Abram gave him the tithes² of the booty. The king of Sodom then said to Abram: "Give me the persons, and the rest take to thyself." But Abram would accept of no reward³.

COMMENTARY.

Peacemaking. Abram was a lover of peace. He was older than Lot and, moreover, the head of the family; yet he withdrew in his favour, and gave him the choice of the best pasturage, rather than that there should be any further strife. We ought to love peace in the same way, and prevent quarrelling and fighting, as far as we can. We ought to give up an advantage, and suffer some loss, rather than begin a quarrel; for we are all brethren in Jesus Christ. "Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God."

Abram's disinterestedness was shown by his conduct on two occasions; first, towards Lot, and next, towards the king of Sodom. When Abram found it necessary to separate from Lot, he did not consult his own interests by keeping the best part of the country for himself, though it was to him and not to Lot that God had promised the whole land; but he gave Lot his free choice of the best pasturage. Then, when the king of Sodom offered him all his booty as a reward, he refused to keep anything for himself. He had undertaken the dangerous war out of pure love, without any thought of his own profit or advantage. His love was, therefore, quite disinterested.

This noble disposition of Abram puts to shame those Christians who are always seeking their own advantage, and who will not even show a kindness to anyone, without hope of reward. But did Abram, then, receive no reward? Yes, he received the reward of a good conscience. The consciousness that he had done a good work, and had deserved a reward of God, filled his heart with very great joy. We, too, ought to value the approbation of our own consciences and of Almighty God, far more than the praise and rewards of this world.

Real love of our neighbour. When Abram learnt the misfortune which had overtaken his nephew, he decided at once to go to his help. He remembered no more Lot's selfish and ungrateful conduct, but only remembered his present necessity and misfortune. He sincerely loved Lot, and wished to help him, even at the risk of great danger; for, after all, these powerful kings might easily have defeated him, and killed or taken him prisoner.

¹ *In thy hands.* i. e. in thy power.

² *Tithes.* i. e. the tenth part of everything that he had taken from the enemy. He gave him this, because he was a priest.

³ *No reward.* Abram did not keep anything for himself, but he asked that the men, who had fought with him and risked their lives, should have their due share of the booty.

Inordinate self-love. Lot did not behave well to Abram. Firstly, he ought never to have accepted Abram's generous offer, and ought rather to have given the preference to his uncle. His love of himself was inordinate, therefore he became selfish. Lot believed he had chosen the best portion, and yet his very choice soon brought misfortune upon him. Secondly, he ought not to have gone so far away from his loving uncle and protector. Thirdly, he ought not to have gone to live in Sodom, full as it was of impious and vicious men. There was great danger there both to himself and his family, who might be led away by the bad example around them. We ought not to throw ourselves into the company of the wicked, and we ought to avoid all occasions of sin. We ought to care more for our souls and their eternal interests, than for our bodies and their temporal interests. Lot, therefore, did wrong in going to Sodom, and putting his soul into danger, for the sake of mere temporal advantages. And God punished him for this by letting the strange kings rob him and take him prisoner.

Melchisedech, the fourth type of Jesus Christ. Melchisedech's name signifies the king of justice, and he was king of Salem, which name means peace: Jesus Christ is in a far higher sense King of justice, and the Prince of peace who bought for us everlasting peace. Melchisedech was not only a king, but also a priest: Jesus Christ is our sovereign king and priest. Melchisedech offered bread and wine to God as an unbloody sacrifice: Jesus Christ offered Himself to His Eternal Father at the Last Supper, under the form of bread and wine, and continues to do so in the holy mass. Melchisedech, after the sacrifice, blessed Abram and his servants: Jesus Christ, by the hand of His priest, blesses the faithful at the end of mass. This will make you understand the meaning of the words which God spoke to the Divine Redeemer by the mouth of the prophet David: "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedech" (Ps. 109, 4 and Hebr. 7, 1—28)

You have now learnt *four types of our Lord*, namely, Adam, Abel, Noe, and Melchisedech. These types show that our Divine Redeemer is, firstly, our Head; secondly, the Just One who suffered and was slain; thirdly, our Saviour from the destruction of sin and hell; and fourthly, an eternal King and Priest who, like Melchisedech, offers an unbloody sacrifice.

APPLICATION. Do you love peace as Abram did? What is the principal reason why you quarrel with other children? Try to be more unselfish. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Ps. 132, 1). If you have hitherto been quarrelsome, check that evil habit as soon as possible.

Abram gave tithes of his spoils to Melchisedech, because he was a priest. Reverence the priesthood. Priests are the messengers of God.

CHAPTER XI.

ABRAM'S FAITH AND ELECTION.—COVENANT OF CIRCUMCISION.—VISIT OF THREE ANGELS.

[Gen. 17—18.]

AFTER these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying: "Fear not¹. I am thy protector², and thy reward exceeding great."³ On a certain night, Abram was called by a voice from heaven which said: "Look up to the heaven and number the stars, if thou canst. So shall thy seed be." Abram believed, and his faith justified him before God. Again, in the 99th year of his age, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him: "I am the Almighty God. Walk before Me⁴ and be perfect⁵. Neither shall thy name be called any more Abram [a high father], but Abraham [father of a multitude], because I have made thee a father of many nations. I will establish my covenant between thee and Me. And this is my covenant which you shall observe between me and you and thy seed after thee: All the male kind of you shall be circumcised.⁶ Sarai [my princess], thy wife, shall be called Sara [princess], and she shall bear thee a son whose name thou shalt call Isaac."

Again when Abraham was one day, about noon, sitting at the door of his tent in the vale of Mambre, he saw three men ap-

¹ *Fear not.* Abram feared that the kings whom he had defeated would revenge themselves on him.

² *Protector.* I will take care of thee under all circumstances.

³ *Exceeding great.* I will give Myself to thee by the eternal vision, as a reward. God promised Himself to be Abram's reward, because he had refused to take any earthly one for what he had done. The possession and contemplation of God is the highest of all rewards.

⁴ *Walk before me.* Have Me always before thine eyes, and remember that I am always with thee.

⁵ *Perfect.* i. e. do only that which is right in My sight: lead a holy life in My presence.

⁶ *Circumcised.* All male infants of eight days old among their own children, as well as all servants bought for household service (Gen. 17, 12) had to be circumcised. The covenant of God was to be (marked) in the flesh, and the soul of the male not so marked was to be destroyed out of his people. Circumcision, then, was instituted by God as a religious rite and as a sacred sign (Sacrament) of admission among the people of God. According to its deeper meaning, it pointed backward to our fallen nature and vitiated origin of life, and forward to the spiritual circumcision of the heart and the new birth through Jesus Christ.

proaching. He ran to meet them, bowed down before them, and invited them¹ to rest in his tent and partake of some refreshment. Calling Sara, his wife, he told her to make some cakes of the finest flour. He caused the best calf of his herds to be killed for the entertainment of the unknown visitors. Butter, milk and honey were also placed before them, Abraham himself waiting upon his guests. After the meal, when they were about to depart, one of the strangers said to Abraham that after a year he would return, and that Sara, his wife, would have a son. Then Abraham understood that the Lord God Himself², accompanied by angels, was his guest.

COMMENTARY.

Faith. At the time that Almighty God told Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens, he and his wife Sara had no children, and both of them were growing very old. Therefore it seemed almost impossible that Abraham and Sara should have a son. Nevertheless, Abraham believed firmly in God's promise that He would give him a son, that his descendants would become a great nation, and that of his family would be born the Redeemer. On account of his faith in God's word, and especially in the promise of the future Saviour, Abraham was justified, i. e. he received sanctifying grace. Without faith no man can be justified, for "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebr. 11, 6). "The just man liveth by faith" (Rom. 1, 17).

Hope. With firm confidence Abraham waited for everything that God had promised him, and gave himself over calmly to His guidance. "By faith he abode in the (strange) land", says St Paul, "dwelling in tents, for he looked for a city that hath foundations (i. e. the heavenly Jerusalem), whose builder and maker is God" (Hebr. 11, 9. 10). He therefore regarded himself as a stranger and a pilgrim, and looked forward to his heavenly home and the eternal possession and vision of God.

Charity. Abraham's faith was living, and active through love. He loved God above all things, as he proved in the story you will hear in Chapt. XIII. In the last chapter we saw how he loved his neighbour, and he again proved this by his behaviour to the three

¹ *Invited them.* He begged the strangers, as a favour to himself, to come and be entertained by him. He also brought water for them to wash their feet. In the East, in those days, people did not wear shoes or boots as we do, but only soles or sandals, bound to their feet by straps. The feet, being bare, became covered with dust, and had to be washed very often. To wash the feet of another was a service of love.

² *God himself.* He knew this, because the stranger revealed things to him which only God could have known.

strangers. Abraham, the rich shepherd-prince, to whom Almighty God had made such great promises, ran to meet the three strangers, bowed down before them, and begged them to stay with him. He washed their feet and served them, while they were eating, though he had servants in abundance. Did not this show a great love of his neighbour, and great humility? As a reward of his virtue, God promised him that in a year he should have a son.

Walking in the presence of God. Thinking constantly of God's presence is a powerful motive for the practice of what is good, and the avoidance of what is evil. Wherever we are, there is God with us, seeing everything we think and do! We ought, therefore, to live with Him, to meditate on His universal presence, and lift up our hearts to Him. By doing this we shall avoid sin and grow in virtue.

The Old Covenant. Almighty God made His covenant first with Abraham, as being the father of His chosen people. Later (on Mount Sinai) He confirmed and renewed it with all the people of Israel. He instituted the rite of circumcision as an outward and visible sign of this covenant, that it might be, as it were, cut into the flesh of His chosen people, so that it could not be forgotten. This sign was to speak to the soul of every man of Israel, saying: "You are a member of the chosen people. You belong to God, and are to serve Him only!"

Circumcision a type of holy Baptism. By circumcision man belonged to the Old Covenant: by Baptism he belongs to the New. By the first he pledged himself to observe the Old Law: in Baptism we pledge ourselves faithfully to observe the Christian Law. Circumcision impressed an indelible mark on the body; Baptism does the same to the soul. The difference lies in this, that circumcision could not, like Baptism, cleanse man from sin, and make him pure and holy of heart.

Heaven. God gives Himself to the blessed as their reward exceeding great. They gaze for ever on His infinite majesty, and are eternally united to Him in love and happiness. Oh, what joy to possess God Himself, who is infinite goodness, beauty and holiness. Could God give us more than Himself?

APPLICATION. Almighty God is near each one of us, and yet how little we think about Him! Do not ever again be so forgetful of God, but put yourself in His presence several times each day. Whenever any one whose opinion you respect is looking at you, you gather yourself together, and are careful to do nothing wrong. Should you not have much more respect for God's presence?

You were put into this world to love and serve God. How have you served Him hitherto? Could you not serve Him better? Renew your baptismal vows to be faithful to Him unto death.

CHAPTER XII.

DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRHA.

[Gen. 19.]

ABRAMHAM went¹ part of the way with the strangers, who were going to Sodom. As they journeyed along together, the Lord² said to Abraham: "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrha is multiplied, and their sin³ is become exceedingly grievous." He told him that He would destroy the two cities. Abraham was struck with fear; for, although the men amongst whom he lived were wicked, he loved them as neighbours. At last, drawing near to the Lord, he said: "Wilt Thou destroy the just with the wicked? If there be fifty just men in the city, shall they perish withal? and wilt Thou not spare that place for the sake of the fifty just, if they be therein?" The Lord replied: "If I find in Sodom fifty just men within the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake." And Abraham said: "Seeing I have once begun, I will speak again to my Lord, whereas I am but dust and ashes⁴. If there be five less than fifty just persons in the city, wilt Thou destroy it?" And the Lord said to Abraham: "I will not destroy it, if I find five and forty." Abraham continued to plead in this manner, till at last the Lord said to him: "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten." Then the Lord disappeared, and Abraham returned to his tent.

The ten just men were not found in Sodom, and the two angels were sent to destroy it. They reached Sodom in the evening, and found Lot sitting at the gate of the city. Lot invited them into his house, and the angels said to him: "Arise, get you out of this place, for the Lord will destroy it. Lot went that night to two young men who were to marry his daughters, and told them to arise and go forth, for the Lord would destroy the city. But they thought that he spoke in jest. At the first

¹ *Went*. A sign that he not only waited on the three strangers, but also accompanied them on their way.

² *Lord*. One of the three Angels bore the name of God in him, and is addressed as such by Abraham.

³ *Sin*. Their sins were many; but those of unnatural impurity were the chief.

⁴ *Dust and ashes*. i. e. though I, a sinful, mortal man, am not worthy to speak to the Lord my God.



Fig. 7. The Dead Sea, (Phot. Bonfilis.)

dawn of day the angels pressed Lot to depart, saying: "Take thy wife and thy two daughters, lest you also perish in the wicked city." And, as Lot still lingered¹, they took him by the hand, and, as it were against his will, led him and his family out of the city, warning them all not to look back, under pain of death. Lot's wife, however, looked back, and was instantly changed into a pillar of salt. The sun had just risen, when Lot entered the neighbouring city of Segor. Then the Lord rained down from heaven fire and brimstone, and utterly destroyed² those two wicked cities, with all their inhabitants.

COMMENTARY.

God's Holiness and Justice are most plainly shown to us by the terrible fate of the wicked cities. The attack made on them by the strange kings was a visitation, permitted by God for the conversion of their wicked inhabitants. But they remained impenitent, and were quite as wicked after, as they were before that visitation. Lot's good example might also have been to them a means of conversion, but they paid no heed to it. Then Almighty God could no longer endure their shameful state of vice, for sin is infinitely abhorrent to the Most

¹ *Lingered.* Hesitating, and unable to make up his mind.

² *Utterly destroyed.* Picture to yourself this terrible judgment which overtook the wicked cities. As the sun rose in the east, and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrha woke from sleep, thick clouds gathered over them, out of which fire fell which kindled every part of the town. The whole air was full of smoke and sulphur; the flames roared and licked up everything. The people, full of fear, rushed from their houses, hoping to escape from the city, but it was impossible to get out. The very air was aglow, and the earth itself, full of pitch and petroleum, was on fire. Their clothes caught fire, and they died a terrible death, shrieking in agony. The whole country round was burnt up, and remains unfruitful to the present day. The earth sank, and the waters of the Dead Sea rushed in, and covered the place where the wicked cities once stood, and formed what has since then been the southern part of the Dead Sea. Lot's wife, who, against the angel's express command, looked back, was suffocated and seized by the fire, covered with the molten bitumen, so that her corpse stood up as a pillar of salt. The *Dead Sea*, the southern portion of which covers the ancient sites of Sodom and Gomorrha, is a peculiar and most ghastly lake (Fig. 7, p. 63). It lies very low, 900 feet below the level of the Mediterranean, and its water is so thick and bitter that no fish or creeping thing can live in it. If the Jordan, which flows into it, carries to it any fish, they die at once and come up to the surface. Therefore, the lake is called the Dead Sea. Objects thrown into it are covered at once with a salt-crust, and the stones on its shores are covered with bitumen. On the surface of the water, and on the shores, great flakes of bitumen are often found. The northern part of the lake is 1300 feet deep, but the southern part, where the wicked cities once stood, is only thirteen feet deep. This Dead Sea, which covers the once beautiful site of Sodom and Gomorrha, is a terrible monument of divine justice.

Holy God. He utterly destroyed the wicked cities from off the face of the earth, and made the whole neighbourhood desolate so that all men might know and fear His terrible justice. "Reducing the cities of the Sodomites and Gomorrhites to ashes, God condemned them to be overthrown", says Saint Peter, "making them an example to those that should after act wickedly" (2 Pet. 2, 6). The punishment of Sodom and Gomorrha is, therefore, always held up as an example of the divine justice.

God's hatred of impurity. This sin having been the chief cause of the destruction of the cities, you can see how hateful it is in the eyes of God, and how severely He punishes it. Impurity is the most shameful of all sins, and an abomination before God. It leads to many other sins, and easily results in impenitence and impiety, as was the case with the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrha. Almighty God does not always punish it in this world, but He will certainly do so in the next world. "Do not err; neither fornicators nor adulterers shall possess the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6, 9).

The duty of intercessory prayer. Intercession for the living and the dead is a spiritual work of mercy. Love prompted Abraham to pray for the wicked Sodomites: love should prompt you to pray for others, for your parents, brothers and sisters, and for your spiritual and temporal superiors; but especially for sinners, that they may have the grace of conversion, and may not be eternally lost. "Pray for one another that you may be saved" (James 5, 16).

The characteristics of prayer. Abraham prayed with fervour, with humility, with confidence, and with perseverance, making his petition six times.

The power of prayer. Abraham's prayer was not made in vain, for Almighty God granted it, in so far that, had there been ten just men in Sodom, the whole city would have been spared. "The continual prayer of a just man availeth much" (James 5, 16).

Lot's steadfastness is worthy of our admiration. He lived for twenty years in the wicked city, and did not let himself be led away into sin, but remained firm in what was right, and brought up his children in the holy fear of God. Therefore, Holy Scripture, in allusion to him, says: "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly from temptation" (2 Pet. 2, 9); because they pray and co-operate with grace.

Sorrow on account of sin. Lot's fellow-citizens in Sodom "vexed his just soul with unjust works" (2 Pet. 2, 8). The sins and crimes which he was obliged to witness hurt his holy soul, because God was offended by them, and many souls were eternally lost. We, far from jesting about the sins of others, should mourn over them. We shall know by our conduct in such cases, whether or no we have a true love for God and our neighbour. "Blessed are they who mourn."

Guardian angels. Holy angels protected Lot and his family. Lot's wife did not take heed to their warning; therefore, she perished.

The torments of hell. The burning of the wicked cities gives us a faint idea of that hell into which the impenitent Sodomites were cast for ever. The torments of the burning inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrha were very terrible; but the torments of the lost souls in hell are far more terrible. The fire of Sodom was kindled from heaven; the fire of hell is kindled by the anger of God. The shrieks of the burning Sodomites were very terrible, but the wailing and gnashing of teeth of the damned are far worse. The bodies of the Sodomites were burnt and the fire was extinguished; but the damned burn and are never consumed, nor is the fire ever quenched.

Intercession. This story shows us how dear the just are in the sight of God. Because Abraham was just, Almighty God heard his prayer, and would have spared the cities for the sake of ten just men. Holy people living in any town or country bring a blessing on the sinners among whom they live, even though they may be scorned and persecuted by them. For their sake, many a temporal punishment is averted. Monasteries and religious houses bring a blessing on the places where they exist.

Inordinate love of temporal possessions. Lot's wife was punished by the death of her body, because, being too much attached to her possessions which she had been obliged to leave behind her in Sodom, she paid no heed to the angel's injunctions, but stopped and looked behind her. Was it not foolish of this woman to weigh the very best of earthly gifts, life, in the balance against her paltry household goods? But those act with still greater madness who, from an inordinate love of honours, riches, pleasures &c., forget the salvation of their souls, and lose the possessions and joys which are eternal.

Temporal punishment. God rewarded the virtue of Lot by saving him from the destruction of Sodom. But he lost all his possessions which were destroyed with the city, and he was thus punished for his selfish conduct towards his uncle. By this punishment of Lot and his wife, we see that God punishes the venial sins and imperfections even of the just. Temporal punishment must be suffered either in this world or in the next, i. e. in purgatory.

The sin of Sodom. The Sodomites committed horrible and unnatural sins of impurity which called down the judgment of God. They are, therefore, counted among the sins which cry to heaven for vengeance.

APPLICATION. How can you imitate Lot's steadfastness?

A just man is wounded by the sins of his fellow-men. He laments their wickedness, and prays for their conversion. How have you behaved hitherto in this respect? How will you behave

in future? At the end of this lesson we will say three Our Fathers for the conversion of sinners.

Detest and fear sin, especially sins of impurity. Set hell before your eyes, think of its horrible torments, and carefully avoid all temptations to such sins. Say thus: "What will the whole world profit me, if I follow my own inclinations, and suffer eternally in hell!"

CHAPTER XIII.

BIRTH OF ISAAC AND ABRAHAM'S SACRIFICE.

[Gen. 21.]

SARA gave birth to a son, as the Lord had promised. He was named Isaac, and circumcised on the eighth day. Abraham loved this son very tenderly, and the Lord wished to see whether he loved his son more than God. When the boy had grown up¹, the Lord said to Abraham: "Take thy only-begotten son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and go into the land of vision, and there thou shalt offer him² for a holocaust³ upon one of the mountains which I will show thee." Abraham instantly⁴ arose, and by night saddled his ass, taking with him two young men, and Isaac, his son. And when he had cut the wood for the holocaust, he went to the place which God had shown him. On the third day he came in sight of Mount Moria, where he was to sacrifice his son; and he said to the servants: "Stay you here with the ass; I and the boy will go with speed as far as yonder, and, after we have worshipped⁵, will return to you." Then he took the wood for the holocaust, and laid it upon the shoulders of Isaac. He himself carried in his hands fire⁶ and a sword. As they went along, Isaac said: "My father." And Abraham

¹ *Grown up.* He was perhaps about twenty or twenty-five years old.

² *Offer him.* Almighty God wished to prove whether his faith were firm and living, and if he really loved Him above all things.

³ *Holocaust.* In that kind of sacrifice the victim had to be first killed, and then wholly burnt.

⁴ *Instantly.* Abraham obeyed immediately, although the required sacrifice tore his heart. Since the destruction of Sodom he had lived at Bersabee which lay to the south of Hebron. From Bersabee to Mount Moria, which was near Salem, was about twenty-five miles. It was on this mountain that, in after years, king Solomon built his splendid Temple.

⁵ *Worshipped.* i. e. when they had offered their sacrifice in worship of God.

⁶ *Fire.* i. e. red hot coals in a vessel.

answered: "What wilt thou, son?" "Behold", said the son, "fire and wood: where is the victim¹ for the holocaust?" Abraham replied: "God will provide Himself a victim for the holocaust, my son." So they went on together.

When they reached the top of the mountain, Abraham erected an altar, placed the wood upon it, bound his son, and laid him on the altar. Then he put forth his hand and took the sword to sacrifice his son. And behold! an angel from heaven cried out to him, saying: "Abraham, Abraham!" And he answered: "Here I am." And the angel said: "Lay not thy hand on the boy, neither do thou anything to him! Now I know that thou fearest God, and hast not spared thy only-begotten son for My sake." Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw behind him a ram², sticking fast by his horns in the bushes; him he took and offered, instead of his son. The angel of the Lord spoke again unto Abraham, saying: "By My own self³ have I sworn, saith the Lord; because thou hast done this thing⁴, and hast not spared thy only-begotten son for My sake, I will bless thee, and will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand that is by the sea-shore. And in thy seed⁵ shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed⁶ My voice." And Abraham returned home with his son.

COMMENTARY.

Strength of faith. Abraham's faith was put to a most severe test. Almighty God had promised him a numerous posterity, and that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed; and yet now He

¹ *Where is the victim?* How the father's heart must have bled at these questions of his son! And what must Isaac have felt, when his father told him that he himself was to be the victim! He was so young, and now he was to die by the hand of his own father! Nevertheless, he submitted to God's will, when he learnt that it was He who had commanded it.

² *Ram.* i. e. a male sheep. Abraham saw that it was by the will of God that the ram was on that spot; so he took him and sacrificed him, instead of his son.

³ *By My own self.* God, being the Most High, can swear by nothing higher than Himself.

⁴ *This thing.* i. e. because thou hast obeyed the command of God, and wert willing to offer up thy son.

⁵ *In thy seed.* i. e. in Jesus Christ, who is the son of Abraham (Matthew I, 1).

⁶ *Because thou hast obeyed.* As a reward for his obedience God now solemnly repeats the same promise which He had made when He first called Abraham, that is, the promise of a numerous posterity, and that the Saviour should be born of his family.

commands him to sacrifice that son through whom alone he could have any descendants! Was not this an apparent contradiction? Nevertheless, Abraham's faith in the word of the Lord was unshaken, and he doubted neither the goodness nor the faithfulness of God. He did not murmur and say: "How can God ask of me such a hard and unnatural sacrifice? How can His promises possibly be fulfilled, if my only son is slain?" No, on the contrary, he said to himself: "God is good, faithful and true: His promise will surely be fulfilled, though how, or in what way, I know not! God is almighty: He is able to raise up Isaac even from the dead" (Hebr. 11, 19). Abraham believed so firmly that he is called a man of faith, and the father of the faithful. His example ought to lead us to believe firmly in God's word, and trust in His goodness and faithfulness, whatever our temptations and trials may be.

The love of God above all things. Abraham had a living faith, that is, he lived up to his faith, and consequently loved God above all things. His love of God had to stand a very severe test. He dearly loved the son whom God had given him, and the command which Almighty God gave him to sacrifice this son, was given to prove whether he loved God more than his son. Abraham, however, did not hesitate for an instant. He got up at once in the middle of the night, and made his preparations for the required sacrifice. He had interceded for the wicked cities, but he had no word to say for his son. He travelled along with the boy for three long days, and his heart must have sorely ached, as he looked upon Isaac and said to himself: "Very soon you will no longer be among the living, for you will have died by the hand of your own father!" However, his resolution never failed. He lifted up his heart to God and said: "Thou, O God, didst give me this son. Thou hast bidden me sacrifice him to Thee. So be it! Thy holy will be done! For love of Thee I will sacrifice him, however hard it be to me!" -- Thus, during those three days' journey he offered up his son a thousand times on the altar of his heart, before he actually bound him and laid him as a victim upon the wood, and raised his hand to slay him. What great, what mighty love! Isaac was dearer to him than anything on earth, and on him he had set all his hopes; but he loved God more than he loved Isaac, and for love of Him he offered up his son. He proved that he loved God above all things.

The object of trials. Why did God try Abraham? Was this trial necessary to show Him Abraham's dispositions? Did He not know beforehand that Abraham's faith was firm, and that he was quite ready to sacrifice his son for love of Him? Yes; God knew all this, because He is omniscient, and for Him, therefore, the test was not necessary: He need never prove men in order to discover their faith, obedience &c. Almighty God did not prove Abraham for His own sake but for Abraham's, in order to give him the opportunity of practising his virtues of faith, love &c., and of thus increasing his merits, and drawing down

on himself fresh graces and blessings. This is why Almighty God so often tries us with all sorts of sufferings and adversities, these tests being of great benefit to ourselves.

The third promise of the Messias. The words: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed", contain a renewed promise of the Redeemer.

Isaac, the fifth type of Jesus Christ. (We have already studied the first four types: Adam, Abel, Noe and Melchisedech.) In what way was Isaac a type of our Blessed Lord? The birth of Isaac was promised repeatedly: so was the coming of Jesus Christ. Isaac was the only and dearly beloved son of his father: Jesus Christ is the only-begotten and beloved Son of God, in whom His Father is well pleased. Isaac was obedient to his father, and was willing, out of obedience, to give up his life, letting himself be bound, and waiting patiently for his death-stroke: Jesus Christ was obedient to His Heavenly Father, unto death, even unto the death of the Cross. "As a sheep He was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb without a voice before his shearer, so opened He not His mouth." Isaac himself carried up the mountain the wood on which he was to be slaughtered: Jesus Christ carried up to Calvary the Cross on which He was to die. Isaac was saved from death by the wonderful intervention of an angel: Jesus Christ was brought back to life by the greatest of all miracles, His resurrection. You see in how many ways Isaac was a most plain type of our Redeemer, of His death and of His resurrection; but the sacrifice of Isaac, all the same, is not a perfect type of the Sacrifice of our Lord, for no figure can perfectly show forth the infinite love of God in giving His Son to die for us. In one main point Isaac's sacrifice was very different from the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Abraham was quite ready, out of love for God, to offer up his beloved son; but Almighty God would not permit the sacrifice to be completed, because sinful man could not be redeemed by a human sacrifice; and therefore the angel of God cried out to him, just as he was going to slay his son: "Hold thy hand!" God spared the son of Abraham, but He did not spare His own Son, but gave Him over to a painful death for our sakes. When, on Calvary, the executioners raised their hammers to nail to the Cross the Hands and Feet of God made Man, no angel cried out: "Hold thy hand!" The Sacrifice was completed, and the Son of God died for us on the Cross in unutterable agony of Soul and Body. "God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, may not perish, but may have life everlasting" (John 3, 16).

The Vicarious Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The ram whose head was caught in the thorns, which was sacrificed instead of Isaac, is a type of Jesus Christ, who was crowned with thorns, and offered Himself for us on the Cross.

APPLICATION. Abraham obeyed without any questioning, when God demanded of him the hardest of sacrifices. God asks nothing very hard of you, and yet you are often disobedient, and transgress those commandments which, by the help of His grace, you might very easily keep. When you disobey your parents, you disobey God, for it is His will that you should obey your parents and superiors.

Abraham practised the three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity in a most perfect way. Try to kindle them in your own heart. Let us conclude this lesson by making acts of faith, hope and charity.

CHAPTER XIV.

ISAAC MARRIES REBECCA.

[Gen. 24.]

NOW Abraham was advanced¹ in years, and the Lord had blessed him in all things. He, however, wished, before his death, to see his son wedded to a virtuous wife. But as the daughters of the land² were wicked, he said to his old servant Eliezer: "Go to my own country³ and kindred, and take a wife thence for my son Isaac, but beware lest thou take one of the daughters of the Chanaanites, among whom I dwell." The servant promised faithfully all that Abraham had commanded him. He then took ten camels of his master's herd, loaded them with rich presents, and set out for Haran, where Nachor, the brother of Abraham, dwelt. Arriving there, he let his camels rest near a well outside the city. It was in the evening, the time when the young women were wont to come out to draw water from the well. Then he prayed fervently within himself that heaven might prosper his undertaking: "O Lord, I beseech Thee, show kindness to my master Abraham. Behold, I stand nigh the spring, and the daughters of the inhabitants of the city will come out to draw water. Now, therefore, the maid to whom I shall say: 'Let down thy pitcher that I may drink', and she shall answer: 'Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also', let it be

¹ *Advanced.* Abraham was now 140 years old, and Isaac 40.

² *The daughters of the land.* The inhabitants of Chanaan did not believe in the true God, but worshipped idols.

³ *My own country.* Before Abraham lived in Chanaan he had lived with his father in Haran of Mesopotamia. Haran was several hundred miles from Bersabee.

the same whom Thou hast provided for thy servant Isaac; and by this I shall understand that Thou hast shown kindness to my master."

He had not yet ended his prayer when Rebecca, a beautiful and modest maiden, came out, carrying a pitcher. She went down¹ to the well, filled the pitcher, and was returning, when Eliezer ran to meet her and said: "Give me a little water to drink out of thy pitcher." She answered him kindly: "Drink, my lord." And quickly she let down the pitcher upon her arm, and gave him to drink. And when he had drunk, she said: "I will draw water for thy camels also till they all drink." Then, pouring water² into the troughs, she let the camels drink. After they had drunk, the servant presented her with golden ear-rings and bracelets, saying to her: "Whose daughter art thou? Tell me, is there any place in thy father's house to lodge?" She answered: "I am the daughter of Bathuel, the son of Nachor. We have a good store of both straw and hay, and a large place to lodge in." Then Eliezer bowed down and adored the Lord, saying: "Blessed be the Lord God of Abraham, who hath not taken away His mercy and truth from him, and hath brought me the straight way into the house of my master's brother!"

He was then invited to the house, and bread was set before him, but he refused to eat, until he had delivered his message. When he had stated the object of his coming, Laban, the brother of Rebecca, and Bathuel, her father, answered: "The word hath proceeded from the Lord³: we cannot speak any other thing but His pleasure. Behold! Rebecca is before thee: take her and go thy way, and let her be the wife of thy master's son, as the Lord hath spoken." Then the servant bowed down to the ground, adored the Lord and, bringing forth vessels of gold and silver, with garments of the finest texture, presented them to Rebecca. He also presented rich gifts to her brother and mother. Then, full of joy, he partook of the refreshments offered to him. Next morning, after Rebecca had received the blessing of her parents

¹ *Down.* The place for drawing water from wells was generally below the surface of the ground and reached by steps leading down to it. But the drinking trough for cattle was above ground.

² *Pouring water.* This was hard work, for there were ten camels, each of which drank a great quantity of water, which had to be carried up to the trough.

³ *From the Lord.* God has so ordained it.

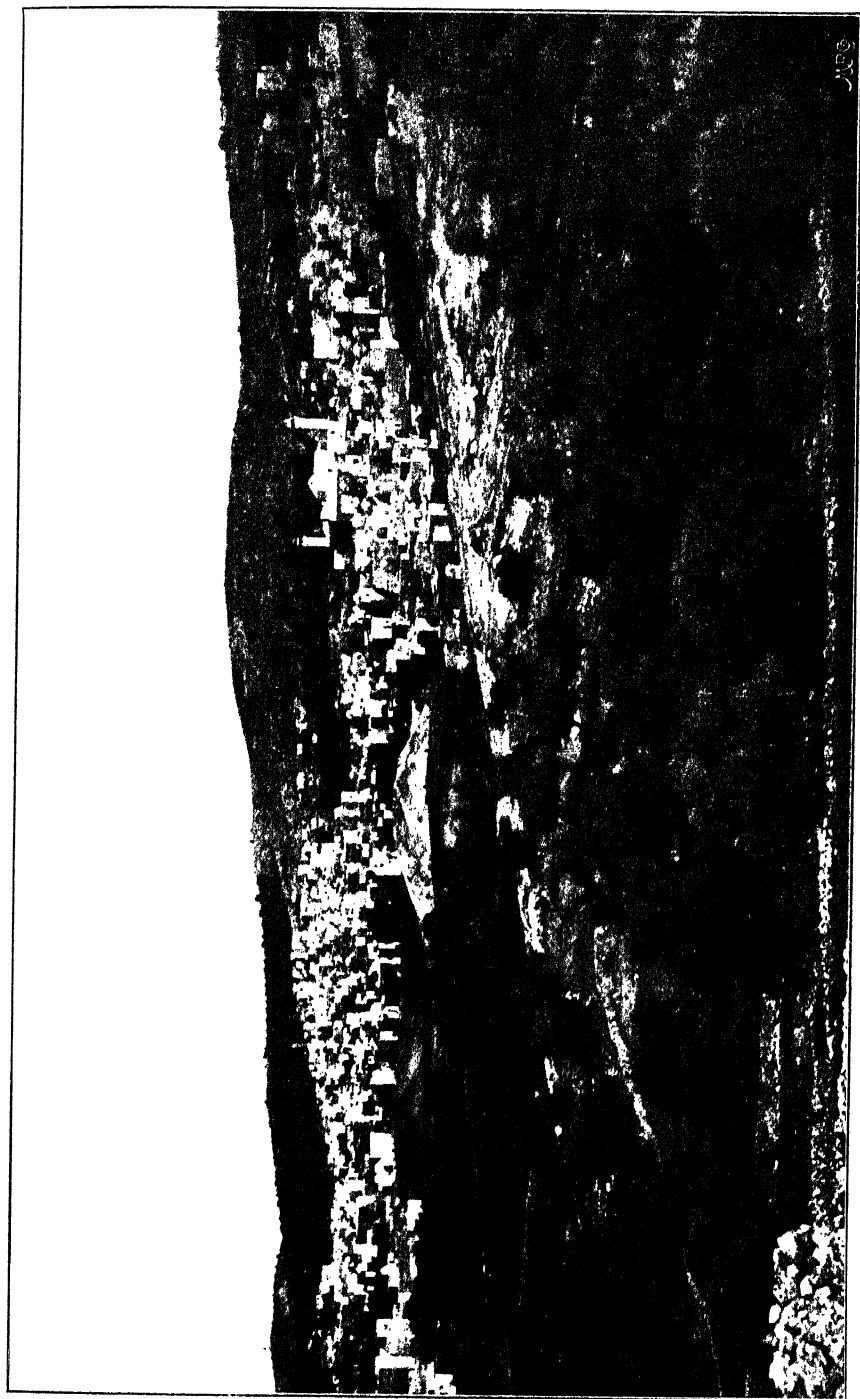


Fig. 8. View of Hebron. (Phot. Bonnis.)

JPG

and brother, she set out with her maidens for her destined home and on arriving there became the wife of Isaac. Abraham lived many years after Isaac's marriage. He died, aged one hundred and seventy-five years, and was buried by his son at Hebron where Sara, his wife, had been buried before.

COMMENTARY.

Unity of faith the chief thing in married life. Almighty God chose Abraham in order that through him and his descendants the true faith might be preserved and spread. Therefore Abraham was very particular to choose for his son Isaac a wife who believed in and served the true God. He was resolved that Isaac should not marry any of the daughters of the heathen Chanaanites, however beautiful or rich they might be, for fear that either he or his children should become weak and wavering in their faith. His first care was that his son's wife should hold the true faith. It should likewise be the first thought of all Catholics, for unity of faith is, above all things, necessary to a happy marriage. Married people who look on religion as a secondary consideration are on the high road to indifference about their faith, and even to the loss of it altogether.

Eliezer the model of a faithful servant. Eliezer fulfilled his master's commission not only with prudence, but also with zeal, for he would not even eat until he had delivered his message, and wished to return to his master as soon as possible after having done so. He, like Abraham, was remarkable for his piety and confidence in God. He prayed fervently for guidance in making a good choice, and thanked God for the gracious guidance vouchsafed to him.

The virtues displayed by Rebecca. She was kind and hospitable to Eliezer, and compassionate towards the thirsty camels. She voluntarily offered to draw water for the beasts, without waiting for Eliezer to ask her to do so. He knew by this action that she had a kind heart, as well as that she was the bride destined by God for Isaac. God looks to the heart and not to the outward appearance, and chose Rebecca on account of her virtues, to be the wife of the patriarch Isaac, from whom the Divine Redeemer was to descend.

A summary of Abraham's virtues. Faith and hope, love of God and his neighbour, hospitality, obedience, love of peace, disinterestedness and final perseverance.

¹ *Hebron.* Hebron (Fig. 8, p. 73) was twenty-five miles to the south of Jerusalem. Near this town was a double cave which Abraham had bought for a family burial-place. This cave was the only possession which Abraham had in the Promised Land. Sara, who had died three years before Isaac's marriage, was buried there.

Limbo. Where did Abraham's soul go after death? "He was gathered to his people" (Gen. 25, 8), i. e. he joined the souls of the just (such as Adam, Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noe &c.), in Limbo. There they rested in the blessed hope and expectation of the coming Redeemer who would deliver them from that prison and take them with Him into the eternal joy of the beatific vision of God.

APPLICATION. Begin and end each day, or any important undertaking, with a prayer for God's blessing. Begin with God and end with God; that is the best rule of life.

Are you obliging to your friends, and to strangers, as Rebecca was? Think in what way you can help others, whether brothers, companions, friends, or strangers, and resolve to make use of your opportunities. God will reward each little service you perform.

CHAPTER XV.

ESAU AND JACOB.

[Gen. 25, 20 to 27, 41.]

ISAAC and Rebecca remained twenty years without children. At length God heard their prayer¹, and gave them two sons. The first-born, Esau, was red and hairy, and of a rough, harsh temper. Jacob, the second, was smooth in appearance and gentle in his bearing. Esau became a skilful hunter and husbandman. Jacob was a plain man, and dwelt in tents. Isaac loved Esau, and ate with pleasure the game that he had killed. Rebecca, on the other hand, loved the mild and gentle Jacob. She loved him the more, because she knew by God's revelation (Gen. XXV, 23) that he, instead of Esau, had found favour with God². One day Jacob was cooking a mess of pottage³, when Esau, coming home from the field, faint with hunger, said to his brother: "Give me of this pottage, for I am hungry." Jacob said to him: "Sell me thy first birthright." Esau replied: „Lo, I die⁴ of hunger: what

¹ *Their prayer.* They had prayed for many years that they might have a son who would be heir of the promises made to Abraham his father.

² *Favour with God.* i. e. that it was God's will that he should have precedence over Esau; that he was to be the heir of the promises, the forefather of the chosen people and of the Divine Redeemer.

³ *Pottage.* A soup of lentils.

⁴ *I die.* This was evidently an exaggeration. He might have appeased his hunger with other food; but he had set his heart on this particular mess of lentils, and would have nothing else.

will the first birthright avail me?" Jacob answered: "Swear, therefore, to me." Esau swore¹ and sold his birthright. And taking bread and the mess of pottage, he ate and drank and went away, making little account of having sold his birthright.

Now Isaac was old² and had lost his eyesight. One day he called Esau, his son, and said to him: "My son, thou seest I am old, and I know not the day of my death. Take thy arms, thy quiver³ and bow, and go abroad⁴; and when thou hast taken something by hunting, make me savoury meat thereof, as thou knowest I like, and bring it that I may eat, and my soul may bless thee before I die." Esau promptly obeyed the command of his father, and went to the fields to hunt. Rebecca had overheard the words of Isaac, and fearing that, contrary to the will of God, Esau might be preferred to Jacob, she said to him: "Now, my son, follow my counsel. Go to the flock and bring me two of the best kids, that I may make of them meat for thy father, such as he gladly eateth; so that, after having eaten it, he may bless thee before he die." Jacob hastened to the flock and brought two kids. Rebecca prepared them as though they were game, and then clothed Jacob in Esau's best garments, and covered his neck and hands with the skin of the kids⁵, and sent him to his father with the meats she had prepared. Isaac asked: "Who art thou, my son?" Jacob answered. "I am Esau, thy first-born; I have done as thou hast commanded; arise, sit, and eat of my venison that thy soul may bless me." Isaac said again:

¹ *Swore*. He swore to give over to Jacob his birthright, or his right of eldest son. The first-born son received a double portion of his father's inheritance, and after his father's death he became the head and priest of the family. In the time of the patriarchs, it entailed not only these temporal advantages, but spiritual advantages also, for by his father's blessing the first-born was made the heir of the divine promises. Hence in those old and venerable patriarchal days children esteemed their father's blessing very highly. It was to them the most valuable part of the paternal inheritance, and was like a sacrament, by means of which God conveyed to them the blessing which He had imparted to their forefathers, and made them the heirs of the promises (*Dupanloup*, De l'Éducation). It was, therefore, most foolish and frivolous of Esau to sell these important rights for a mere mess of pottage!

² *Old*. He was 137 years old and quite blind.

³ *Quiver*. A sheath in which arrows are placed, something like the sheath into which a soldier puts his sword.

⁴ *Abroad*. Out hunting.

⁵ *Skin of the kids*. The skins of the Angora-goat, the hair of which is very soft.

"Come hither that I may feel thee¹, my son, and may prove whether thou be my son Esau or no." Jacob then drew near to his father, and Isaac touching him said: "The voice, indeed, is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau."² And he gave him his blessing.

Scarcely had Jacob gone out when Esau came with the game he had taken and cooked for his father. "Arise, my father, and eat," said he. Isaac, in surprise, asked him: "Who art thou?" and he answered: "I am thy first-born son Esau." And Isaac saw that Jacob had deceived him. Then Esau roared out with a great cry, saying: "He hath already taken from me³ my birth-right, and now he hath robbed me of my father's blessing."⁴ Then he said to his father: "Hast thou kept no blessing for me?" And as he continued to cry out and lament, Isaac, moved with compassion, said to him: "In the fat of the earth, and in the dew of heaven from above, shall thy blessing be. Thou shalt live by the sword, and shalt serve thy brother⁵; but the time shall come when thou shalt shake off and loose his yoke from thy neck." From this time Esau hated his brother.

COMMENTARY.

Jacob's selfishness. Jacob did not behave either nicely or rightly when he turned his brother's desire for the pottage to his own advantage, and asked such a high price for it. He behaved very selfishly, and not at all like his unselfish grandfather, Abraham.

Lies and dissimulation. Jacob sinfully deceived his father in a twofold way. To begin with, he told a direct lie; but he also lied to his father in another way, by dissimulating, putting on Esau's clothes which smelt of the field, and covering his hands with the hairy skins. It is quite possible to lie without speaking a word. When you dissimulate,

¹ *Feel thee.* That I may know by the touch.

² *Hands of Esau.* They are as hairy as the hands of Esau.

³ *Taken from me.* Was that true? No, for he himself had sold it to Jacob. Now, in his anger, he laid all the blame on his brother.

⁴ *My father's blessing.* i. e. the blessing to which I, as the eldest son, have the right. But he no longer had a right to it, having sold his birthright, and sworn with an oath that he gave up all claim to it. He ought to have told his father this, when Isaac announced his intention of giving him his blessing.

⁵ *Serve thy brother.* Isaac fully understood and realised that it was by God's special providence that Jacob received the blessing of the first-born, and that this could not be altered.